




***In
His
Likeness***



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IN HIS LIKENESS

Homilies for Liturgies in Honor of the Saints

by the
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TO MY PARENTS, EDWARD AND MARY YOST
AND TO ALL WHO HAVE TAUGHT ME TO PREACH
BY WORD AND ESPECIALLY BY VIRTUOUS
EXAMPLE

PREFACE

There is much that we can learn from the saints. They preach to us by the example of their lives, and many of them by the charity and wisdom of their words. We learn from them much as younger children learn from their older brothers and sisters. The saints are indeed our brothers and sisters in the Christian family.

In the celebration of the liturgy we are taught the great mysteries of salvation, recalling the events in the life and ministry of Jesus, his mother Mary, and the saints closely associated with Jesus. We also relive the history of God's people in both covenants, and we learn from and are inspired by what we recall.

We also are taught by the lives and example of the saints and from their words which express their faith and offer advice. The saints preach to us in the liturgy, and it is to our advantage to know who they are and what they mean to us.

The late Cardinal John J. Wright said in a sermon preached in 1956 in Worcester, Massachusetts:

"Who are the saints, and what is their function in our lives? A modern writer puts it somewhat like this: From the beginning God intended us to walk before His face in holiness. But we could hardly know what holiness is, for our fathers became entangled in evil and error, and the fantasies of sin obscured the vision of sanctity within us and among us. And so, God sent His Son to live among us that whoever saw Him might see the holiness of the Father also. But as the years go by, even *His likeness* is continually darkened by human interpretations, painted over and distorted, until His features are scarcely discernible; we come to remember Him only on the level of doctrine, not as we first saw Him in the flesh and in the glory of His holiness. Then the saint comes and lives the very life of Christ, as it were, before the eyes of those who share his circumstances, his work, and his manner and condition of life. He represents that life of Christ so that each of us, seeing both something of Christ and something of himself in the saint, glean and guess with longing how Christ would have lived had He been here and shared our walk in life.

“This is the great function of the saints; this is the temporal point of our preaching and memory of their sublime merits. This is the greatest gift of the saints to us — not the stream of good deeds which they shower on the earth, not the great works of their hands nor the books of their wisdom — but that, because of them, the *living likeness* of the Master of men, the hero of our race, the image of the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father full of grace and truth, never quite disappears from the earth. Our saints, each in the context and calling they share with us, reflect, to each of us according to our nature and need, that which God wills and our own best selves desire us to be.” (*The Saints Always Belong to the Present*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985, p. 67-68).

The sermons presented here are drawn from the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours, from the teachings of the Church, from the biographies and writings of the saints and from other sources that help us appreciate and understand the saints and their relevance to us today.

It is my hope that the use of this material will be as inspiring to the preacher and the hearer as the preparation work has been inspiring and encouraging to me.

Rev. Charles E. Yost, SCJ, STL
Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary
August 15, 1988
Pinellas Park, Florida

ST. BASIL THE GREAT, AND ST. GREGORY OF NAZIANZEN, BISHOP, DOCTORS

St. Basil the Great was an ecclesiastical statesman and administrator. He was also a great exponent of Christian doctrine, a defender of orthodoxy, the father of eastern monasticism, and a reformer of liturgy. In short, he was the outstanding ecclesiastical personality of his time.

Basil (329-379) was born in Caesarea (in present day central Turkey). As a young man in his 20's he resolved to devote his life to God. In a letter (n. 223) he wrote: "I had wasted much time on follies and spent nearly all my youth in vain labors, and devotion to a teaching of a wisdom that God had made foolish. Suddenly I awoke as out of a deep sleep. I beheld the wonderful light of the Gospel truth. . . I shed a flood of tears over my wretched life, and I prayed for a guide who might form in me the principles of piety."

He was baptized, and then set out to seek spiritual guidance from the ascetics in the desert. Upon returning home he gave his wealth to the poor, and returned to live austere in the desert. Soon others were attracted to him for guidance, and out of that grew the monastic movement in the east.

His talents were outstanding and he was called to Church administration which involved him in ecclesiastical and political disputes involving the Arians. He was a prolific writer, and his treatises sermons and letters were admired in his lifetime. St. Gregory of Nazianzen, whom we honor today as well, said in a sermon: "I was not alone at that time in my regard for my friend, the great Basil. I knew his irreproachable conduct, and the maturity and wisdom of his conversation. I sought to persuade others, to whom he was less well known, to have the same regard for him. Many fell immediately under his spell." (Sermon 43).

St Basil was the founder and leader of the monastic movement. He influenced St. Benedict, Cassian and others in the West, and his legislation survives today in the East.

Not so prolific a writer, and more of a contemplative than St. Basil is Gregory of Nazianzen (330-389), whom we honor together with Basil in today's liturgy. Contemporaries and friends, they met in school at Caesarea. Gregory later joined Basil in the desert, sharing his interest in monastic life. Reluctantly he accepted ordination to the priesthood from his father, Bishop of Arianzum. He also was prevailed upon by Basil, already a bishop, to govern the see of Nazianzen, and later was named Archbishop of Constantinople.

St. Gregory never remained long in these posts. He detested controversy, and regularly retired to a life of solitude. His preference for that is expressed in his sermon in praise of St. Basil:

"Our single object and ambition was virtue, and a life of hope in the blessings that are to come; we wanted to withdraw from this world before we departed from it. With this end in view we ordered our lives and all our actions. We followed the guidance of God's law and spurred each other on to virtue." (Sermon 43. Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Gregory's last five years were spent in writing and monastic practices. He died in 389 or 390.

St. Gregory of Nazianzen is remembered primarily as an eloquent preacher and a poet. His sermons are profoundly theological, surpassing even Basil in the depth of his thought.

Together, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nazianzen, and Basil's younger brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa were a formidable trio of teachers of the faith at a time when the Church needed to build on their theological foundations.

ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON, RELIGIOUS

September 14, 1975 was a significant day for the Catholic Church in the United States. On this day Pope Paul VI canonized Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821), the first native born citizen to be so honored. She typified the American pioneer spirit, the spirit of the nation. Her response to Christ was as a wife, and mother, and then as a convert to Catholicism, religious sister, and foundress of a religious community. She was graced by God in all these roles "so that she might spend her life in service" to God's people. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

Born into wealth, and baptized in the Episcopal Church, she married William Seton when she was 19. Together they had ten children, and because of William's illness and failure in business, life was difficult for them. William died while they were travelling in Italy, and it was at that time Elizabeth became acquainted with Catholicism through friends. She was a widow at age 30, and entered the Catholic Church, drawn by her belief in the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and her devotion to Mary. She was for her the ideal of a woman of faith, and later called Mary "the first Sister of Charity on earth."

The foundation of her spiritual life was a strong personal relationship with God, developed through prayer, and nourished by the Eucharist. Her strong faith enabled her to abandon herself to God's will: "And what was the first rule of our dear Savior's life? You know it was to do his Father's will. Well, then, the first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills; and thirdly, to do it because it is His will."

She tried to pass on to others her principles, convictions and strong faith and her interests as a teacher. We know her as the foundress of the first parochial school in our country.

She was a realist, and practical in her approach to virtue: "After a long time in the service of God, we come nearly to the point from whence we set out, and perhaps with even less ardor

for penance and mortification than when we began our consecration to him.”

Elizabeth knew how to struggle through difficulties. Jesus attracted people because he identified with them and gave them hope through his message and his kindness. Elizabeth Ann Seton did the same. Her life experience was the same as so many of us. Her spirituality was simple and genuine. Her faith was a very powerful driving force that enabled her to accomplish all that she did in the face of rejection, misunderstanding and depression. Her trust in God never wavered: “Keep your eye of faith always open. Perseverance is a great grace. To go on gaining and advancing every day, we must be resolute, and bear and suffer as our blessed forerunners did. Which of them gained heaven without a struggle?”

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton exemplifies the christian roots of our nation, and she is an esteemed model of the Catholic contribution to our religious heritage. Her life, example, and her values can inspire us; they challenge us as individuals, as a Church and as a nation.

We pray today: “Through her example and prayers may we learn to express our love for [God] in love for our fellow men and women.” (Opening Prayer).

ST. JOHN NEUMANN, BISHOP

Known for his holiness and learning, his writing and preaching, John Neumann (1811-1860) is the first American bishop to be canonized. Pope Paul VI, on October 19, 1977, recognized "his life of service, zeal and compassion" for the guidance of God's people in the new world. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

John Neumann came to our country from Bohemia and after his ordination to the priesthood he devoted himself to parish work. Parishes at that time were vast areas. John's parish was near Buffalo, New York where he ministered to four hundred widely scattered families of various ethnic backgrounds. For that reason his language skills were much appreciated. His special love however was the catechetical instruction of children.

Seeking to enrich his own spiritual life he entered the Redemptorists and became the first of that congregation to profess vows in the United States in 1842. Ten years later he was named Bishop of Philadelphia.

His famous organizational ability is noted in the Opening Prayer of the Mass which asks his intercession to help "build up the community of the Church through our dedication to the Christian education of youth." When John arrived in Philadelphia as bishop in 1852 there were two Catholic grammar schools; at the time of his death eight years later there were one hundred.

John was always an unpretentious pastor, untiring in his personal zeal and compassion. His great desire was to minister to the young and the poor, and he even offered to resign as bishop and return to this first love. To Cardinal Barnabo he wrote: "I am prepared without any hesitation to leave the episcopacy. I have taken this burden out of obedience, and I have labored with all my powers to fulfill the duties of my office, and with God's help, as I hope, not without fruit. . ." Further on in the letter he explained his love of pastoral ministry: "I am much more accustomed to the country, and will be able to care for the

people and faithful living in the mountains, in the coal mines and on the farms, since I would be among them." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

To St. John Neumann goes the credit for initiating the Forty Hours Eucharistic Devotion in the United States. Notable, too, was his charity towards the poor and needy, so much so that he was at times chided for his frugality with respect to his own belongings.

Today as we honor our first Ameican bishop-saint, we can express our thanks to God for the many pioneer priests and bishops in our nation's history. They labored with holy zeal to build up the community of God's people in our land, the community from which we draw strength and encouragement in our time.

BLESSED ANDRE BESSETTE, RELIGIOUS

The sixth of ten children, Alfred Bessette, later known as Brother Andre, was born on August 9, 1845 near Montreal. His parents died when he was a youngster and he was raised by relatives. As a child he was often ill, and his education practically nothing at all. Later in his early teens he was taught to read by the Holy Cross Brothers, and his favorite reading was the Gospels. He said: "It is not necessary to have been well educated. . . (in order). . . to love the good God. It is sufficient to want to do so generously."

Even as a youngster he spent time in prayer and devotions. He had an understanding of the value of penitential practices beyond his young years. We learn that his aunt who was raising him was horrified by his practices.

Alfred joined the Holy Cross Brothers in 1870 and became Brother Andre. He spent his life doing menial tasks, truly humble in the service of God: "Personally I am nothing," he wrote, "God chose the most ignorant one. If there was anyone more ignorant than I, the good God would have chosen him."

Brother Andre is known for "his great devotion to St. Joseph and a special commitment to the poor and afflicted." (Opening Prayer). Through his efforts the magnificent shrine to St. Joseph, in Montreal, was built, and remains a popular place to pilgrimage today.

This holy Brother had an inner happiness that he communicated to all, especially to the poor. He spent many hours after his daily work routines visiting the sick and elderly. His counsel to them came out of his own experience with suffering and illness: "Thank God for having visited you through suffering; if we knew the value of suffering, we would ask for it."

As his reputation for holiness spread, many came to him for cures. Often he would say to them: "Can one bargain with the good God? The best way to be cured is to submit to the will of God."

Brother Andre's faith was supported by his prayer and especially by his great love for the Holy Eucharist. He encouraged frequent communion: "If you ate only one meal a week, would you survive? It is the same for your soul. Nourish it with the Blessed Sacrament. A nice table is set there for us with something good on it."

We cannot help being attracted to this simple, humble man and we are edified by his strong faith and ardent love. His death was a peaceful one on January 6, 1937 and he was beatified by Pope John Paul II on May 23, 1982.

ST. RAYMOND OF PENYFORT, PRIEST

"The light of his teaching has shone on those who dwell in darkness.

By the strength of his love he has delivered the poor and freed captives from their chains.

He led out those who wandered in the paths of sin, and freed the poor man from the grasp of his oppression."

This Responsory to the Second Reading in *The Liturgy of the Hours* is a statement of appreciation of St. Raymond of Penyfort (1175-1275). A lawyer and a canonist, he joined the Dominicans at age 47. Because of his talents which were already known, he was called to Rome by Pope Gregory IX to be his confessor. He was entrusted with the task of continuing to collect and organize church laws. In this respect he is an important source for what later became the Code of Canon Law in 1917.

St. Raymond was an outstanding preacher who taught a respect for law, which he saw as a safeguard for the rights and freedom of all, and as a means to promote the common good. Law is a principle of freedom, and St. Raymond subscribed to the teaching that "He who hates the law is without wisdom, and is tossed about like a boat in a storm." (*Sirach* 33:2).

In our day the II Vatican Council addressed this issue in the *Declaration on Religious Liberty*. In it the Council expressed an intent "to develop the teaching of recent popes on the inviolable rights of the human person and on the constitutional order of society." (no. 1). The Council teaches, from a tradition that goes back to St. Raymond, the law must give "effective constitutional protection" so that "man's rights and duties. . .be protected." (no. 15).

St. Raymond was also a compassionate spiritual guide and wrote an influential handbook for confessors that dealt with the sacrament of penance and provided some practical guidance. Since he was a capable administrator, he was appointed Archbishop of Tarragona, Spain, but because of illness he was

permitted to decline the appointment. Two years later at age 63 he was elected to succeed St. Dominic as Master General of the Dominicans, and directed the reorganization of the order's constitutions. He resigned at age 65, and for the next 35 years of his life he devoted himself to preaching and to the conversion of the Moors and their former slaves in Spain. He died in his 100th year, in 1275.

St. Raymond was blessed with the "gift of compassion in his ministry to sinners," (Opening Prayer), and today we ask his prayers "to free us from the slavery of sin," and for his help "to love and serve [God] in freedom." (ibid).

ST. HILARY OF POITIERS, BISHOP, DOCTOR

One of the leading and most respected theologians of his time, St. Hilary of Poitiers (c315-367) is called in the liturgy, "defender of the divinity of Christ." (Cf. Opening Prayer).

It was through the study of the scriptures that Hilary was converted from paganism and baptized. Though married, he was elected Bishop of Poitiers about the year 350, and spent the next eighteen years combating Arianism, the heresy that denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. At that time it was as much a political as a theological problem, and Hilary suffered exile for many years because of his staunch defense of Catholic doctrine.

As a theologian he had the respect of his contemporaries and the gratitude of those who followed him. He was an acknowledged leader of the Western bishops in their struggle against Arianism, and is honored as one of the great Western doctors of the Church.

In a sermon on the Trinity, St. Hilary tells of his desire to teach truth:

"I am well aware, almighty God and Father, that in my life I owe you a most particular duty. It is to make my every thought and word speak of you.

"In fact, you have conferred on me this gift of speech, and it can yield no greater return than to be at your service. It is for making you known as Father, the Father of the only-begotten God, and preaching this to the world that knows you not and to the heretics who refuse to believe in you." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

He goes on to express his need to understand the Scriptures and tradition, and concludes with a prayer:

"Impart to us, then, the meaning of the words of Scripture and the light to understand it, with reverence for the doctrine and confidence in its truth. Grant that we may express what we believe." (ibid).

On this feast day of St. Hilary we pray for a deeper understanding of the mystery of the divinity of Jesus, and the grace to profess it in our day as St. Hilary did in his.

ST. ANTHONY, ABBOT

"Seeing the kind of life he lived, the villagers and all the good men he knew called him the friend of God, and loved him as both son and brother." We read these words from the *Life of St. Anthony* by St. Athanasius in our Office of Readings today.

What we know of St. Anthony (or Antony, 251-356) is from St. Athanasius. Born in Egypt, he is honored as the founder of monasticism. St. Athanasius wrote his life shortly after his death, writing that "you also, once you have heard the story, will not merely admire the man, but will wish to emulate his resolution as well." Athanasius presents a model of a life consecrated to God. St. Augustine in his *Confessions* tells us that the book had a decisive influence on his own conversion and on the vocations of others to the monastic life.

Anthony at age 20 took literally the gospel injunction to sell what he had and give it to the poor. For the next 85 years he lived an austere, ascetical life, devoting himself to prayer, and reading the scriptures. He did manual labor to earn his food, and gave any excess he had to the poor.

Though he preferred solitude, he took time to give guidance and instructions to the many who lived an ascetical life in the desert. He organized them into monasteries, laying the foundation for monasticism.

Another great desire of Anthony's was to be a martyr, but he failed to obtain this grace. Athanasius tells us that he then "went back to his solitary cell; and there he was a daily martyr to his conscience, ever fighting the battles of the faith. For he practiced a zealous and more intense ascetical life." For Anthony, the monk was the successor to the martyr. St. Anthony died in solitude at the age of 105.

He had renounced the world to serve God in the solitude of the desert and was "called the friend of God." We ask through his intercession the grace to keep in proper perspective the material things we have and to live in a spirit of detachment from

them through self-denial. We also ask for the grace to understand the love of God above all things. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. FABIAN, POPE, MARTYR

The early Church during the time of the persecutions was strengthened by the courage and constancy of the martyrs. These martyrs give us firm roots in the past. They are those who "have gone before us marked with the sign of faith." (Eucharistic Prayer I).

St. Cyprian, in a letter, tells of Fabian's martyrdom in the persecution of Decius in the year 250. "I was quite happy that his virtuous demise corresponded with the integrity of his administration."

Fabian was a layman when elected pope in the year 236. The Church historian, Eusebius, tells us that he came into the city from his farm while the election was in progress, and that a dove settled on his head leading the clergy and people to choose him to be Bishop of Rome. He was pope for fourteen years, but we know little of those years. Yet Fabian left an impression as a holy man. St. Cyprian wrote to his seccessor, St. Cornelius, that he was an incomparable man whose glory in death matched his holiness of life.

In the letter about Fabian's death, (our Second Reading today in the Office of Readings), Cyprian wrote that his death was "an example of faith and courage," and that "it is helpful and encouraging when a bishop offers himself as a model for his brothers by the constancy of his faith."

So we pray that St. Fabian "help us to share his faith and offer [God] loving service." (Opening Prayer).

ST. SEBASTIAN, MARTYR

The images of St. Sebastian with which we are familiar are a young man tied to a post and shot full of arrows. Tradition tells us he was a soldier, and a christian, and that he exhorted christians sentenced to death to remain firm. It also informs us that he made many converts.

When it was discovered he was a christian he was condemned to death. The legend has it that he survived the attempt to execute him with arrows, and recovered. Then he denounced the emperor for his cruelty to christians. For this he was then beaten to death.

St. Ambrose spoke of Sebastian in an explanation of Psalm 118, which is read today:

"He was a native of Milian. . .He set out for Rome, where bitter persecutions were raging because of the fervor of the Christians. There he endured suffering; there he gained the crown. He went to the city as a stranger and there established a home of undying glory." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

St. Sebastian chose the law of God over the law of man. As the responsory to our reading notes: "For the law of God this holy man engaged in combat even unto death. . .He renounced earthly joys and so gained the kingdom of heaven."

In prayer today we ask for the "same spirit of courage which gave. . .Sebastian strength to offer his life in faithful witness." We also ask for help to cherish God's law when it conflicts with the law of man. (Cf. Opening Prayer). This is a meaningful prayer today since God's laws governing the sanctity of life are ignored in human laws. To oppose such laws takes the courage of a martyr.

ST. AGNES, VIRGIN, MARTYR

Of the early Roman virgin martyrs we know little other than what legends tell us, or what we learn from some of the great Fathers who left us sermons commemorating celebrations in honor of these heroic young women.

St. Agnes is said to have suffered martyrdom at the age of 12. "The cruelty that did not spare her youth shows all the more clearly the power of faith in finding one so young to bear it witness." (St. Ambrose, *Treatise On Virginity*, Book I; Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

The martyrdom of St. Agnes is factual, but the details are legendary. A beautiful young girl of a wealthy family, she resolved early to live purely and to consecrate her virginity to God. This was not an uncommon practice even in the third century. Denounced by unsuccessful suitors, she was sent to a house of prostitution. There she successfully preserved her virginity by her saintly conduct and in one instance by a miracle. She was ordered beheaded, or stabbed in the throat. St. Ambrose remarked that she was "too young to know of death, yet . . . ready to face it."

The Opening Prayer of Mass tells us that God chooses "what the world considers weak to put worldly power to shame."

St. Ambrose continues:

"In the midst of tears, she sheds no tears herself. The crowds marvel at her recklessness in throwing away her life untasted, as if she had already lived life to the full. All are amazed that one not yet of legal age can give her testimony to God, though her testimony in human affairs could not yet be accepted. What is beyond the power of nature, they argue, must come from its creator." (*Op. cit.*).

"While still so young, she overcame death and found true life." (Responsory to 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

ST. VINCENT, DEACON, MARTYR

Vincent “displayed his faith in what he said, his endurance in what he suffered.” (St. Augustine).

The Church has always been inspired by the heroic example and the strong faith of her martyrs. There are sufficient numbers from all periods of Church history to convince us of the reality of the grace of martyrdom. We know the faith of martyrs is courageous, their love constant, their heroics genuine and inspiring. How else could they endure the indignities and tortures inflicted on them!

In a sermon on St. Vincent which we read today, St. Augustine said:

“No one ought to rely on his own feelings when he speaks out, nor be confident in his own strength when he undergoes temptation. For whenever we speak prudently as we should, our wisdom comes from him, and whenever we endure evils courageously, our long-suffering comes from him. . .

“If you were to consider in Vincent’s martyrdom only human endurance, then his act is unbelievable from the outset. But first recognize the power to be from God, and he ceases to be a source of wonder.” (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

St. Vincent was a deacon to his bishop at Saragossa, Spain. Vincent and his bishop, St. Valerius, were imprisoned and tortured in the year 303, at Valencia. Hunger and torture failed to break them, and Valerius was exiled. Further tortures inflicted on Vincent were particularly cruel, but God gave him “the courage to endure torture and death for the gospel.” (Opening Prayer).

Compared to the martyrs, our daily trials and difficulties seem insignificant, yet we can take hope and encouragement from them. They endured great physical suffering and death to give witness to Jesus Christ and the values he taught by his own example and death.

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, BISHOP, DOCTOR

St. Francis de Sales (1547-1622) is one of the most appealing saints of all times. The Opening Prayer of the Mass indicates why: he had “the spirit of compassion to befriend all . . . on the way to salvation.”

Francis had an understanding of how the spiritual life and devotion are practiced in ways according to one's life situation. He marvellously explained this in his spiritual writings, especially in *The Introduction to a Devout Life*, and in his *Treatise on the Love of God*.

He wrote:

“When God the Creator made all things, he commanded the plants to bring forth fruit each according to its own kind; he likewise commanded Christians, who are the living plants of the Church, to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one in accord with his character, his station and his calling. . . For the practice of devotion must be adapted to the strength, to the occupation and to the duties of each one in particular.” (*Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part 1, Chapter 3)

Francis de Sales was born in Savoy, France in 1567. After studying law at Padua he pursued his goal of becoming a priest. In doing this he had to gently and patiently win the consent of his father, who had objected. He was ordained in Geneva, Switzerland, and immediately set out to overcome the errors of the Calvinists. He wished to restore Catholicism there by his preaching and writing and had great success. He continued this work after becoming Bishop of Geneva in 1602. His gentle character and sensitivity to people in all walks of life are traits that will always be remembered.

These traits are very evident in his spiritual writings which show an understanding of human nature. His spiritual advice is always given gently, and his best preaching is found in these writings:

"The bee collects honey from flowers in such a way as to do the least damage or destruction to them, and he leaves them whole, undamaged, fresh, just as he found them. True devotion does still better. Not only does it not injure any sort of calling or occupation, it even embellishes and enhances it. Moreover, just as every sort of gem, cast in honey, becomes brighter and more sparkling, each according to its color, so each person becomes more acceptable and fitting in his own vocation when he sets his vocation in the context of devotion. Through devotion your family becomes more peaceful; mutual love between husband and wife becomes more sincere. . .and our work, no matter what it is, becomes more pleasant and agreeable." (*Op. cit.*, *ibid*).

St. Francis de Sales taught that holiness is for everyone and that all of us must aspire to the life of perfection. He explained how that is possible for all. We can all begin by imitating this gentle saint, and relating to one another with compassion and love.

CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL

"God our Father, you taught the gospel to all the world through the preaching of Paul your apostle." (Opening Prayer).

St. Paul was a tireless apostle both in his work as a preacher and in his personal living out of the gospel he preached. His conversion is one of the most dramatic moments in religious history. It was so sudden, so intense, so mysterious, and so fruitful for the Church.

St. John Chrysostom in a homily praising St. Paul, said:

"Paul, more than anyone else had shown us what man really is, and in what our nobility consists. . . Each day he aimed ever higher; each day he rose up with greater ardor and faced with new eagerness the dangers that threatened him. He summed up his attitude in the words: *I forget what is behind me and push on to what lies ahead.* . . The one thing he feared, indeed dreaded, was to offend God; nothing else could sway him." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

As we honor the apostle of the nations, and celebrate his conversion, we ask that the "Spirit who helped Paul. . . to preach [God's] power and glory, fill us with the light of faith, so that we may follow him in bearing witness to. . . truth." (Opening Prayer, and Prayer Over the Gifts).

STS. TIMOTHY AND TITUS, BISHOPS

Sts. Timothy and Titus are known to us from the Acts of the Apostles, some Letters addressed to them, and from mention of them in the other letters of St. Paul.

Timothy was converted by Paul, along with his grandmother Lois. His mother was a Jewish Christian. He became Paul's trusted associate and the Letter to the Hebrews (13:23) suggests that he was for a time imprisoned with Paul. Paul had earlier entrusted him with the care of the Church at Ephesus, and had sent him on several important missions mentioned in his Letters. Timothy himself was the recipient of two letters containing much personal advice.

Titus, a Greek, was entrusted with the care of the Church on the island of Crete. Paul refers to him in 2 Corinthians 8:23 as "my partner and co-worker." He accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1), and like Timothy, was Paul's emissary on several occasions.

These two saints were capable and zealous in their efforts on behalf of the early Church. They were noted for having "the courage and wisdom of the apostles," (Opening Prayer). Although we honor these two saints today, we may presume that other christian communities in apostolic times were blessed also with saintly and capable leaders. These two, like so many others, were bishops noted for their "righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness." (1 Timothy 6:11).

ST. ANGELA MERICI, VIRGIN

Orphaned at age 10, Angela was raised by an uncle, and by age 13 she was living an austere life as a Franciscan tertiary. After the death of her uncle she took an interest in the education of poor children. She realized that the education of young girls among the poor was especially neglected.

Angela gathered around her a group of young women who shared her ideals and interest. The number soon grew to 28 and on November 25, 1535 they dedicated themselves to God under the protection of St. Ursula. They continued to live at home, without vows, but observed the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. Their purpose from the beginning was to provide for the religious education of girls especially among the poor. They also hoped to re-christianize their families as these girls grew up to be wives and mothers.

This company of St. Ursula became a religious congregation only several years after the death of Angela, who died in the year 1540. The group became the Congregation of St. Ursula four years later with the approval of Pope Paul III.

In her *Spiritual Testament* St. Angela wrote:

“A good tree, that is, a good heart as well as a soul inflamed with charity, can do nothing but good and holy works. For this reason St. Augustine said: *Love and do what you will*, namely, possess love and charity and then do what you will. It is as if he had said: Charity is not able to sin.” (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

The gentle character of St. Angela can be appreciated in another passage from this same *Testament*:

“You ought also to exercise pleasantness toward all, taking great care especially that what you have commanded may never be done by reason of force. For God has given free will to everyone, and therefore, he forces no one but only indicates, calls, persuades. Sometimes, however, something will have to be done with a stronger command, yet in a

suitable manner and according to the state and necessities of individuals; but then we should be impelled only by charity and zeal for souls." (ibid).

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, PRIEST, DOCTOR

In St. Thomas Aquinas “the Middle Ages reached its full flowering and Christianity received its most towering influential intellect.” (J. Delaney, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 553). Thomas has also been called “the preeminent spokesman of the Catholic tradition of reason and of Divine Revelation.”

Born in 1225, Thomas was sent at age 5 to the Benedictine Abbey at Monte Casino. His mother hoped that he would one day be the abbot. Thomas later chose to join the Dominicans, and did so in 1244 over the objections of his family. He completed his studies under St. Albert the Great and was ordained a priest at Cologne, Germany in 1248. For the next several years he taught in Paris, Rome, Naples and other cities, but his greatest contribution to the Church are his philosophical and theological writings.

In the pursuit of knowledge he taught that faith and reason, help us to arrive at certain conclusions. In the *Summa Theologica* he wrote: “We must say that for the knowledge of any truth whatsoever man needs divine help. But he does not need a new light added to his natural light, in order to know the truth in all things, but only in some that surpasses his natural knowledge.” (I-II, 109,1).

As brilliant as his theological writings are, it is in his many commentaries and spiritual writings that we find a wealth of practical advice and guidance. From his Commentary on the Creed we read an excerpt in today’s Office of Readings:

“Why did the Son of God have to suffer for us? There was a great need, and it can be considered in a twofold way: in the first place, as a remedy for sin, and secondly, as an example of how to act.

“It is a remedy, for, in the face of all the evils which we incur on account of our sins, we have found relief through the passion of Christ. Yet, it is no less an example, for the passion of Christ completely suffices to fashion our lives.”

St. Thomas saw Christ on the Cross as an example of love and of patience in suffering. He was an example of humility in submitting to the judgement of Pilate, and in obeying the will of his Father.

The asceticism of St. Thomas Aquinas can be appreciated as he continues in this commentary:

"If you seek an example of despising earthly things, follow him who is *the King of kings and the Lord of lords, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. Upon the cross he was stripped, mocked, spat upon, struck, crowned with thorns, and given only vinegar and gall to drink.

"Do not be attached, therefore, to clothing and riches, because *they divided my garments among themselves*. Nor to honors, for he experienced harsh words and scourgings. Nor to greatness of rank, for *weaving a crown of thorns they placed it on my head*. Nor to anything delightful, for in my thirst *they gave me vinegar to drink*."

He was very learned, yet he was also a man of great humility and holiness. Thomas Aquinas continues to teach us by his word and example. He is the patron of universities, colleges and schools, and his theology dominated Catholic teaching for seven centuries. Thomas died in 1274, was canonized in 1323, and proclaimed Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius V in 1567.

Through his intercession we pray today that we "grow in wisdom by his teaching, and in holiness by imitating his faith." (Opening Prayer).

ST. JOHN BOSCO, PRIEST

St. John Bosco (1815-1888) was born to poor parents in the Piedmont area of northern Italy. His interest in priesthood began at an early age, and he received encouragement for this because of his interest in helping poor and needy boys. John was ordained in 1841 at Turin, and immediately gave himself to that work, finding shelter for neglected youth and instructing them in religion.

In a short time, other priests joined him in his work and by 1852 they were caring for over 600 boys. John dealt with them by "using a minimum of restraint and discipline, lots of love, keeping careful watch over their development and encouraging them personally and through religion." (J. Delaney, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 116).

John's preaching and writing, as well as the charitable support of wealthy and powerful patrons allowed for expansion of his work. The need for dependable assistants led to the founding of the Society of St. Francis de Sales in 1859, and it continues his work today.

To provide similar care for poor and neglected girls John Bosco founded, in 1872, the Daughters of Our Lady, Help of Christians.

The life of St. John Bosco was full and his zeal contagious. He never tired of talking and writing about his work for the young and their care. On this feast day the Church has chosen for the Office of Readings an excerpt from one of his letters. It expresses his concern and is applicable for our time when children suffer from neglect in broken homes and in less than ideal welfare situations.

John wrote:

"If we wish to appear concerned about the true happiness of our foster children and if we would move them to fulfill their duties, you must never forget that you are taking the place of parents of these beloved young people. I have

always labored lovingly for them, and carried out my priestly duties with zeal. And the whole Salesian Society has done this with me.

“Let us regard those boys over whom we have some authority as our own sons. Let us place ourselves in their service. Let us be ashamed to assume an attitude of superiority. Let us not rule over them except for the purpose of serving them better.

“This was the method that Jesus used with his apostles. He put up with their ignorance and roughness and even their infidelity. He treated sinners with a kindness and affection that caused some to be shocked, others to be scandalized, and still others to hope for God’s mercy. And so he bade us to be gentle and humble of heart. . .” (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

John Bosco would be pleased with the concern that the Church has today for education. This concern is expressed in the II Vatican Council’s *Decree on Christian Education*:

“True education is directed toward the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult, have a share.” (G.E. n. 1).

John Bosco died on January 31, 1888 and was canonized in 1934 by Pope Pius XI. St. John Bosco is honored by us as an outstanding “teacher and father to the young,” and we ask that we be filled “with love like his.” (Opening Prayer).

ST. BLASE

"Through the intercession of St. Blase, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from ailments of the throat and from every other evil. . ."

These are the words of the special blessing of the throats customarily given on this day.

We know very little about St. Blase other than that he was bishop of Sebaste, in Armenia, in the early years of the fourth century. Legend takes over from there, and tells the story of an anxious mother who hurried to Blase with her little boy who had a fish bone lodged in his throat. The saint called for two candles, lit them, held them in the form of a cross under the child's chin, recited prayers and blessed the boy. Immediately the bone loosened and was removed. Devotion to St. Blase was very popular during the Middle Ages, and continues to this day.

We all want relief and protection from physical troubles and ailments of the throat — (hoarseness, choking, colds, cancer). But there are also spiritual diseases of the throat, more harmful often than the physical. We ask protection from these as well when we ask for deliverance "from ailments of the throat and *from every other evil.*" These are spiritual troubles which are beyond the cure of the greatest throat specialists. They are the evils of unkind speech, choking curses and gagging lies.

The Apostle Paul had these in mind when he wrote to the Romans (3:13), quoting Psalm 5, vs. 11: "Their throat is an open sepulchre. With their tongues they have dealt deceitfully. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." Such spiritual illnesses are truly most harmful, and these, too, we want to be cured of through the intercession of St. Blase.

As you receive the blessing of St. Blase today, ask through his intercession for deliverance from physical and spiritual evils of the throat and tongue.

ST. ANSGAR, BISHOP

St. Ansgar (801-865), a ninth century Benedictine monk and bishop, was born in Amiens, France. His missionary work was in Denmark after the conversion of King Harold. He was invited also to Sweden where he remained a short time. Then he was recalled to become the abbot of a new monastery and Archbishop of Hamburg, Germany in 831. He was named legate to Scandinavia, and for the next fourteen years labored there only to see all his work come to naught because of the destructive invasions of the Norsemen. He returned to Germany in 854 and then nine years later returned to Denmark and Sweden. He experienced some success there, but the whole area lapsed into paganism after his death.

Ansgar is remembered as an extraordinary preacher, a humble, ascetical priest and a bishop, who was greatly concerned for the poor and the sick. Miracles accompanied his missionary work, but he thought little of them. He said that he would ask of God only one miracle, "that by his grace he would make of me a good man."

He was untiring in his missionary efforts and often prayed for a martyr's crown. He often endured hardships from hostile pirates and maurading tribes. His death, however, was a peaceful one and he died in Bremen, Germany, in 865.

The zeal of St. Ansgar and the many missionaries like him, both past and present, continues to be a source of inspiration for us. As they responded to the call of God, so must we. The II Vatican Council in the *Decree of the Church's Missionary Activity* reminds us:

"Every disciple of Christ is responsible in his own measure for the spread of the faith, but Christ the Lord is always calling from among his followers those whom he wills, so that they may be with him and be sent by him to preach to the nations. . . In preaching the Gospel to the nations he must boldly proclaim the mystery of Christ. . . and not be

ashamed of the scandal of the cross. He must follow in the footsteps of his Master, who was gentle and humble of heart, and reveal to others that his yoke is easy and his burden light." (*Ad Gentes*. nos. 23-24).

St. Ansgar preached courageously and bravely overcame difficulties, disappointments and hardships. During all of this he persevered to "bring the light of Christ to many nations." (Opening Prayer).

ST. AGATHA, VIRGIN, MARTYR

"She achieved renown in the early Church for her noble victory," wrote St. Methodius of Sicily. (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Legend is again our story teller concerning this saint. St. Agatha was martyred during the persecution of Decius, mid-third century, in Sicily. Agatha refused marriage to a young consul, Quintian, who used the threat of the persecutions to persuade her. Refusing him she was subjected to indignities and torture, but bravely persevered. She "found favor with [God] by her chastity and by her courage in suffering death for the Gospel." (Cf. Opening Prayer).

St. Methodius also said in his sermon:

"A true virgin, she wore the glow of a pure conscience and the crimson of the Lamb's blood for her cosmetics. Again and again she meditated on the death of her eager lover. For her, Christ's death was recent, his blood still moist. Her robe is the mark of her faithful witness to Christ. It bears the indelible marks of his crimson blood and the shining threads of her eloquence. She offers to all who come after her these treasures of her eloquent confession." (*Op. cit.*).

Methodius continued his praise of her:

"Agatha — her goodness coincides with her name and way of life. She won a good name by her noble deeds. . . Agatha, her mere name wins all men over to her company. She teaches them by her example to hasten with her to the true Good, God alone." (*Op. cit.*).

ST. PAUL MIKI AND COMPANIONS

"I hope my blood will fall on my fellow men as fruitful rain."

These are words of St. Paul Miki, Jesuit brother and eloquent preacher, one of the martyrs honored today. Twenty six Japanese and European, Jesuits, Franciscans, and laymen, young and old, were martyred on February 5, 1597 at Nagasaki, Japan.

Their intercession is needed today for the spread of the faith in the land where their blood was shed for the sake of Gospel. Faith and zeal such as theirs helped keep christianity alive in Japan during the many years when that nation was cut off from outside influence. Catholics in Japan today are very much in the minority. They comprise only a fraction of 1%, but they are a respected Church.

A harvest is still to be realized in Japan, and when it happens it will be the fruit of the blood of these martyrs and others. (On Sept. 28 another group of martyrs led by St. Lawrence Ruiz are commemorated. They were martyred in Nagasaki in the seventeenth century).

Today we celebrate and commemorate Paul Miki and his companions, who were led by God "through the suffering of the cross to the joy of eternal life." (Opening Prayer). This prayer recalls the words of Origen in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*: "What more could be appropriately called the day of salvation than the day of such a glorious departure from this world."

ST. JEROME EMILIANI, PRIEST

St. Jerome Emiliani (1481-1537) was a Venetian, chose a military career and lived a rather careless and carefree life. He was captured in battle and cruelly imprisoned in chains. During that time he learned to pray, and resolved to reform his life. After escaping he went to Treviso and became mayor of that town, but soon returned to Venice and sought ordination to the priesthood. That goal he realised in 1518, when he was 37 years old.

Outbreaks of the plague were endemic in northern Italy during the late 15th and the 16th centuries, and like many religious individuals Jerome began to care for the sick and poor. He took a particular interest in orphaned children, eventually founding a religious institute to do this work and to educate the young abandoned youth. St. Jerome Emiliani, "father and friend of orphans," (Opening Prayer) died as a result of illness contracted while caring for the sick and poor.

The Church, in the tradition of the ancient prophets, has always been dedicated to the poor and needy in the manner of St. Jerome Emiliani. In that tradition the Church continues to urge us to be conscious of this mission:

"You hear rising up more pressing than ever, from their personal distress and collective misery, 'the cry of the poor.' Was it not in order to respond to their appeal as God's privileged ones that Christ came, even going as far as to identify himself with them?" (*Evangelica Testificatio*, n. 17).

This is an exhortation addressed to religious but is significant for all. The point of reference is the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, nos. 63ff, which deals with economic and social life.

The World Synod of Bishops in 1971 also stated in "Justice in the World," that "we must be prepared to take on new functions and new duties in every sector of world society, if justice is really to be put into practice. . ." Our action is to be

on behalf especially of the “silent, indeed voiceless, victims of injustice.”

Our dedication to the poor after the manner of the saints is demanding and to give ourselves to it St. Jerome Emiliani tells us “to place our trust in God and in no one else. . . God. . . does not work in those who refuse to place all their confidence and hope in him alone. But he does impart the fullness of his love upon those who possess a deep faith and hope; for them he does great things. . . If then you remain constant in faith in the face of trial, the Lord will give you peace and rest for a time in this world, and for ever in the next.” (From a letter to his brothers; 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

ST. SCHOLASTICA, VIRGIN

St. Scholastica (480-547), the twin sister of St. Benedict, was "consecrated to God from her earliest years." (St. Gregory the Great). A short time after Benedict founded his monastery at Monte Casino, Scholastica established a community of women a few miles distant, most likely under the guidance of St. Benedict.

St. Gregory the Great in his *Dialogues* tells of the spiritual bond between Benedict and Scholastica. It is from Gregory that we learn the story of Scholastica's prayer to have Benedict prolong his annual visit with her as she had a premonition of her death. The *Dialogues* inform us that she died three days after Benedict returned to his monastery and that he knew the moment of death: "Looking up to the sky, he saw his sister's soul leave her body in the form of a dove."

The early monasteries for women were places for virgins and widows to gather in community to dedicate themselves to an intense spiritual life. Prior to the late fourth century they lived at home in semi-seclusion. Around the early part of the fifth century however, they banded together in small communities, as did the monks.

Whatever the facts may be, St. Scholastica's intent was to provide an opportunity for prayer in a setting free from the distractions of the world. The great bishops and writers of the time noted this and addressed letters of guidance and short tracts of instruction to these women. The purpose then is still the same today for religious men and women, as noted in the *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops*, of the II Vatican Council. The decree states that it is the duty of religious to promote the general welfare and growth of the Church "by means of prayer, works of penance and by the example of their own lives." (*Christus Dominus*, n. 33).

The vast majority of the people in the Church are not priests and religious, but all share in the same mission to build up the

Body of Christ. The Council addresses this in the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, n. 3: "From the fact of their union with Christ the head, flows the laymen's right and duty to be apostles. Inserted as they are in the Mystical Body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, it is by the Lord himself that they are assigned to the apostolate. If they are consecrated a kingly priesthood and a holy nation (Cf. *I Peter 2:4-10*), it is in order that they may in all their actions offer spiritual sacrifices and bear witness to Christ all the world over."

ST. CYRIL, MONK AND ST. METHODIUS, BISHOP

Sts. Cyril and Methodius were brothers who are honored as missionaries to the Slavic peoples. Their work of teaching and laboring among them during the mid and late ninth century is still evident today. They left a heritage in language and liturgy especially. The strength of the Slavic faith goes back to the missionary efforts of these holy brothers. Cyril was a monk and probably a priest, and Methodius was, for a time, governor of a Slav colony, and then became a monk, abbot and later bishop.

Their missionary efforts met with frustrations, difficulties and unjust accusations of heresy. This was due largely to their use of the vernacular language in the liturgy. Their efforts and courageous acts have enriched the spiritual and liturgical lives of the people of a vast area of eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Bohemia, Southern Poland, Yugoslavia. The cultures of these places are indebted to them as well.

St. Cyril died in Rome in 869, while St. Methodius continued his work for another fourteen years. He died on April 6, 884. Recognition is given to their work and their vision by the II Vatican Council in the *Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches*, where it states:

"History, tradition and very many ecclesiastical institutions give clear evidence of the great debt owed to the Eastern Churches by the Church Universal. Therefore the holy council not merely praises and appreciates as is due this ecclesiastical and spiritual heritage, but also insists on viewing it as a heritage of the whole Church of Christ." (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 5).

In another place the Council stated:

"The Church, which has been sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God to all men and to all peoples, is aware that for her a tremendous missionary work still remains to be done. There are two billion people — and

their number is increasing day by day — who have never, or barely, heard the Gospel message; they constitute large and distinct groups united by enduring cultural ties, ancient religious traditions, and strong social relationships.” (*Ad Gentes*, the *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*, n. 10).

In the lives and in the humble, dedicated service and missionary activity of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and their disciples we can all find inspiration, and through their prayers we can all “become one in faith and praise.” (Opening Prayer).

SEVEN FOUNDERS OF THE ORDER OF SERVITES

Between the years 1225 and 1227, seven young men of prominent Florentine families (Buonfiglio Monaldo, Alexis Falconieri, Benedict dell' Antella, Bartholomew Amidei, Ricovero Ugucione, Gerardino Sostegni, and John Buonagiunta) met together out of their desire to live a life of devotion. In particular they had a special devotion to Mary. They came to understand through prayer and spiritual direction, as well as a revelation from the Virgin Mary that they were chosen "to be her servants. . .and to follow the Rule of St. Augustine." They became known as the Servants of Mary.

After several years of life in solitude and prayer, at the wish of their bishop six of them were ordained priests, while Alexis humbly begged to be excused. The new community adopted a form of religious life after the Mendicants, and their numbers increased. They began to engage in the active ministries of teaching, preaching and a parochial-like ministry. All seven co-founders remained very active throughout their lives. Alexis supposedly lived to the age of 110.

The thirteenth century was a time of introspection in the Church. It was a restless time, and a time of change. There was an awareness that reform and change were needed. The impetus for much of this came from the mendicant orders that were founded in this century: Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Augustinians, and Servites. The IV Lateran Council, called in the year 1215, began the effort to revitalize doctrine and discipline. The Mendicant orders were effective in assisting in these areas, and the Servites were numbered among them.

The Church is aware that religious orders and congregations have a prophetic role. This is noted in the II Vatican Council, speaking in the present, but also in recognition of the past. The Council stated in the *Constitution on the Church* that the Church will ensure the establishment of religious institutes to build up

the Body of Christ (Cf. n. 45). In an exhortation in 1971 to religious we read also:

“The charism of the religious life far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood, or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit who is always at work within the Church. (*Evangelica Testificatio* n. 11).

Today we honor seven saints, filled with love, inspired by grace to honor Mary with special devotion, who had the courage and vision give themselves to the work of building up the Body of Christ. Their work continues today in the religious community they founded, the Servants of Mary, as they continue to lead people to God.

ST. PETER DAMIAN, BISHOP, DOCTOR

Orphaned when very young, Peter was mistreated by the brother in whose charge he was placed. He was rescued however by another brother who was archpriest of Ravenna, and who saw to his education. Peter became an excellent teacher, and out of his own experience developed a sensitivity to the poor, sharing all of what he had with them. Even prior to his resolve to become a monk he fasted, prayed for long hours and undertook other disciplines. Eventually he joined a community of hermits and became abbot about the year 1043. From that time on he was called upon to be a peacemaker and settle disputes among religious and civil authorities. In 1057 he was appointed Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia, and reluctantly came out of his solitary life. Throughout his life he made "Christ and the service of the Church [his] first love." (Opening Prayer).

Later, when he was permitted to resign his see and return to his monastic life, he continued to write and work for the reform of the Church. His concerns were to rid the Church of simony, to correct the laxity of clergy and religious, and to heal various schisms that broke out.

From Peter Damian's writings we come to some understanding of the asceticism of the time. In an article, "The Gregorian Reform," by Karl F. Morrison, we read: "Cardinal Peter Damian described how he combined mortification of will and body in an exercise of self-flagellation performed while he recited penitential psalms and prayers. Such practices were designed to intensify devotion and fervor, particularly the sense of sharing in the poverty and suffering of Christ." (*Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, p. 189).

From Peter Damian's own writings:

"When men suffer pain for the evil they have perpetrated in life, they should take some reassurance. They also know that for their good deeds undying rewards await them in the life to come. . . The way that God deals with men can only

be praised. He lashes them in this life to shield them from the eternal lash in the next. He pins people down now; at a later time he will raise them up. He cuts them before healing; He throws them down to raise them anew." (from a letter; 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

That was the spirituality and asceticism of the time. We do not embrace today everything that motivated St. Peter Damian, but we understand him in the light of the 10th and 11th century. We cannot fault him for his vision, zeal and discipline.

Today we prefer to preach about the virtue of love in the saints' life. Such a motivation and approach to spirituality we find applicable for all in the *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People* from the II Vatican Council:

"The fruitfulness of the apostolate of lay people depends on their living in union with Christ: as the Lord said himself: 'Whoever dwells in me and I in him bears much fruit, for separated from me you can do nothing.' (Jn. 15:5). This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is maintained by the spiritual helps common to all the faithful, chiefly by active participation in the liturgy" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 4).

The Council goes on to say that we do not separate union with Christ from ordinary life, but that through the performance of our tasks we promote union with Christ.

"This is the path along which laymen must advance, fervently, joyfully, overcoming difficulties with prudent patient efforts. . . A life like this calls for a continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity." (ibid).

The language of today is different, but the goal is the same. "By making Christ and the service of his Church the first love of our lives," we ask that we may "come to the joys of eternal light," by following the "teachings and example of St. Peter Damian." (Opening Prayer).

CHAIR OF PETER, APOSTLE

This feast of the Chair of Peter dates back to the fourth century in Rome. It commemorates Peter's confession of faith: "You are the Messiah, the Son of God," (Matthew 16:16). It also recalls the promises of Jesus to Peter that his faith would be firm and that he would be a rock foundation that would survive the death of Jesus and all attempts to destroy what Jesus founded.

This promise of Jesus gives the Church boundless confidence in God as she carries out her mission of building up His kingdom. Peter grew in understanding of his authority and the unique grace given to him, as well as his responsibility to be a pillar of unity, faith and love. The *Acts of the Apostles* shows the beginning of an understanding of the Petrine charism in the new community of God's people.

Pope St. Leo the Great said in a sermon:

"Out of the whole world one man, Peter, is chosen to preside at the calling of all nations, and to be set over all the apostles and all the fathers of the Church. Though there are in God's people many bishops and many shepherds, Peter is thus appointed to rule in his person those whom Christ also rules as original ruler. Beloved, how great and wonderful is this sharing in his power that God has in his goodness given to this man." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*). St. Leo continued to explain that on the strong foundation of Peter's faith Jesus "will build up an enduring temple."

We celebrate more today than just the primacy of St. Peter. The Church through Peter is entrusted with an awesome responsibility, namely, the salvation of all people. Firm and unerring faith, and an authoritative symbol of external strength and stability has marked the office of Peter and his successors.

Already in the second century a certain primacy of honor was given to the Bishop of Rome and the Church of Rome. An important witness is St. Irenaeus, who was a bishop in Southern Gaul (France). He had a respect for the Church of Rome

because of its 'superior origin,' namely, its founding by the apostles Peter and Paul. He wrote: "For with this Church, because of its more efficient leadership, all Churches must agree, that is to say, the faithful of all places, because in it the apostolic tradition has been always preserved by the (faithful) of all places."

In the third through the fifth centuries a claim to primacy becomes more clear, without serious challenges to the claim. Pope Damasus I (364-384) and more strongly his successor, Siricius (384-399) claimed a primacy over the other Churches in both doctrinal and disciplinary matters. With Pope St. Leo the Great (461-468) in the fifth century it becomes more precise by his action/intervention in the Christological controversies and by his teaching with respect to his office. His influential teaching determined the latter course of the papacy.

In the same sermon just mentioned, St. Leo said:

"The authority vested in this power (the power to bind and loose) passed also to the other apostles, and the institution established by this decree has been continued in all the leaders of the Church. But it is not without good reason that what is bestowed on all is entrusted to one. For Peter received it separately in trust because he is the prototype set before all the rulers of the Church."

In honoring St. Peter today and praying through his intercession that "nothing divide or weaken our unity in faith and love." (Opening Prayer) we express our confidence and trust in the promise of Jesus that his Church will perdure and that the Petrine office will continue to serve all of God's people; that it will continue to be a blessing of the new covenant.

The papacy, even with its human faults, has been and will be with God's support, the stable rock that will keep us "true to the faith" taught by St. Peter and the apostles and their successors, and will "bring us to God's eternal kingdom." (Prayer Over the Gifts).

ST. POLYCARP, BISHOP, MARTYR

St. Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna (present day Ismir, Turkey) during the first half of the second century. He is one of the revered christian figures of his time, and he was a disciple of the apostles. St. Irenaeus specifically says that he was a disciple of St. John. We learn from the testimony of Irenaeus and others and from his own letters that he was a man of strong faith. In a letter defending the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus he wrote:

“For every one who shall not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is antichrist; and whoso shall not confess the testimony of the Cross is of the devil; and whoso shall distort the words of the Lord to his own desires, and say that there is neither resurrection nor judgement, this is the first-born of Satan.”

His letters for the most part are exhortatory, and there is a gentleness about the writing that has appeal still today. To priests he wrote:

“The presbyters must be tenderhearted, merciful toward all, turning back (the sheep) that have gone astray, visiting the sick, not neglecting widow or orphan or poor man, but always taking thought for that which is honorable in the sight of God and of man, abstaining from all anger, respect of persons, unrighteous judgement, being far from all love of money, not hastily believing (anything) against any one, not stern in judgement, knowing that we are all debtors because of sin.”

And to all he wrote:

“When it is in your power to do good, withhold not, because alms deliver from death. All of you be subject to one another, having your behavior blameless among the Gentiles, that by your good works both you may receive praise, and the Lord may not be blasphemed in you.”

From St. Polycarp we come to an appreciation of how the

early christian communities understood the preaching of the gospel, and we sense his intense personal loyalty to Jesus.

St. Polycarp was martyred in the year 155, and there is a letter written by an eyewitness. It is the oldest account of a martyrdom of a single individual. We read from it in the Office of Readings today. Polycarp was condemned to death by burning; the letter tells that he protested that nails would not be necessary to secure him, as his strength would come from Jesus. He spoke:

“Lord, almighty God, Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have come to the knowledge of yourself. . . I bless you for judging me worthy of this day, this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ, your anointed one, and so rise again to eternal life in soul and body, immortal through the power of the Holy Spirit. May I be received among the martyrs in your presence today as a rich and pleasing sacrifice.”

Even today we are inspired by his words. From the letter we learn, too, of the reverence for the remains of the martyrs, and of the honor justly paid to them: “The martyrs we love as being disciples and imitators of the Lord; and deservedly because of their unsurpassable affection for their King and Teacher.”

The spiritual advice of St. Polycarp is timeless and gentle:

“Stand fast, therefore in [your] conduct and follow the example of the Lord. ‘firm and unchangeable in faith, lovers of brotherhood, loving each other, united in truth,’ helping each other with the mildness of the Lord, despising no man.” (*Letter to the Philippians*, 10).

BLESSED KATHARINE DREXEL

As a wealthy young woman, at age 20, Katharine Drexel (1858-1955), decided to use her considerable inheritance for the benefit of the poor. Her stepmother, Emma Bouvier, was a definite influence on her life, both with respect to her piety and her love and concern for the poor. In her early 20's Katharine began to think of a religious vocation. After the death of her father, she and her sister began to use their wealth to help others.

At first counselled to continue her philanthropic work outside religious life, Katharine, at a private audience with Pope Leo XIII, in 1887, spoke of the need to have more priests work with the American Indians. The pope's response to her was: "Why not, my child, yourself become a missionary?"

Upon returning home Katharine accompanied Bishop James O'Connor of Omaha on a tour of western missions. A year later she decided to become a religious and entered a novitiate program with the Sisters of Mercy. On February 12, 1891, Katharine made religious vows as the first Sister of the Blessed Sacrament for Indian and Colored People.

Her life's work lay ahead of her and for the next forty years she directed the work of her Congregation of Sisters. By the year 1935 when Katharine suffered a heart attack, the Sisters had 49 foundations in the west and the south.

Throughout her life Katharine was a deeply religious woman and a model of piety. Her declining health and the subsequent necessity to turn over her administrative duties to others finally allowed her more time for the contemplation to which she was originally attracted.

In 1941 Pope Pius XII wrote to her and described her work as "a glorious page in the annals of the Church."

Katharine died at the age of 96, on March 3, 1955. On November 20, 1988 she was beatified by Pope John Paul II who spoke of her life as one "of exceptional apostolic service." In his

sermon at the Mass of beatification the Holy Father said she “was a woman of lively faith, deeply committed to the truth revealed by Christ, the truth she knew so well because she constantly listened to Christ’s voice.”

Much of Katharine’s spiritual strength was drawn from the Blessed Sacrament, as Pope John Paul noted: “She was always eager to deepen her love for Jesus, whom she received and adored each day in the Eucharist. Her union with Christ the King gave her confidence that whatever was done in His name would bear much fruit for the sake of the kingdom.”

It is our privilege to remember and honor Blessed Katharine Drexel, who lived so close to our place and time. She was a virtuous, holy woman who preaches to us by her contemplation and apostolic zeal.

ST. CASIMIR

Son of the king of Poland, Casimir (1458-1483) from his early years was an exceptional student. He was virtuous and devout, and sensed the importance of prayer and practiced austere penances. Those around him described him as "serene and cheerful, and pleasant to all."

When he was 15 years old his father was prevailed upon to send him to Hungary to be king. But rivalries and wars were so contrary to his character that he returned to Poland, and resolved never to be involved in war. Vowed to celibacy he refused marriage and returned to study and prayer. His ardent devotion to Christ in the Holy Eucharist and to Mary motivated his charity toward the poor. A biographer who was his contemporary wrote:

"Nothing was more pleasant, nothing more desirable for him, than to share his belongings, and even to dedicate his entire self to Christ's poor, to strangers, to the sick, to those in captivity and to all who suffer."

The same biographer also wrote of him:

"Daily he urged his father to practice justice throughout his kingdom. . . He actively took up the cause of the needy and unfortunate. . . He was never unapproachable. . . He always preferred to be counted among the meek and poor in spirit; had no ambition for the power that lies in human rank. . . He was afraid the barbs of wealth. . . would wound his soul." (Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

St. Casimir died at the age of 23, of lung trouble and was canonized in 1521. He is honored especially in Poland and in Lithuania where he is buried (in Vilna). Among all people this youthful saint offers hope as they learn from him that "peace is not won by war; sometimes a comfortable peace is not even won by virtue," but Christ's spirit and peace can overcome all difficulty.

STS. PERPETUA AND FELICITY, MARTYRS

St. Perpetua, a noble lady of Carthage, mother of an infant son, and her slave, Felicity, an expectant mother and a group of other catechumens, were martyred on March 7, 202 A.D. The account of their sufferings, written by Perpetua herself and an eyewitness, was so popular in the African Churches a century later that St. Augustine protested that they were not to be given the same reverence as the Sacred Scriptures.

Perpetua describes the horror of the imprisonment, her anxieties, the birth of Felicity's daughter. The day of their execution was chronicled by the witness and tells of the hostility of the crowd at the amphitheatre and the cruelty of the soldiers. The women were beheaded after torments, while the men were killed by the wild beasts.

This account is one of the most beautiful pieces of ancient christian literature.

From Perpetua: "What a day of horror! Terrible heat. . . Rough treatment by the soldiers! To crown it all, I was tormented with anxiety for my baby. . . Such anxieties I suffered for many days, but I obtained leave for my baby to remain in prison with me, and being relieved of my trouble and anxiety for him, I at once recovered my health, and my prison became a palace to me and I would rather have been there than anywhere else."

The witness, possibly the great Tertullian, provides details of the actual torments on the day of death:

"The day of the martyrs' victory dawned. . . they marched from their cells. . . with cheerful looks and graceful bearing. If they trembled it was for joy and not for fear.

After the initial torments, Perpetua exhorted all: "Stand firm in faith, love one another and do not be tempted to do anything wrong because of our sufferings."

There is drama in this writing, and it must have awed the

christians in the post-persecution era, as it does us today, who are far removed from those times.

In a sermon St. Augustine said:

“The Church flourishes everywhere through the glorious deeds of the holy martyrs. With our own eyes we can judge the truth of our song, that *the death of his saints is precious in the sight of the Lord*. It is precious in our sight and in the sight of the Lord as well, for in his name they died. . . The Lord of heaven directed their minds and tongues; through them he overcame the devil on earth and crowned them as martyrs in heaven. Blessed are those who have drunk of this cup. Their torments are at an end, and they have taken their place of honor. And so, my dear ones, consider: although you cannot see with your eyes, do so with your mind and soul, and see that *the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord*,” (Sermon 329, On the Birthday of Martyrs).

ST. JOHN OF GOD, RELIGIOUS

The life of St. John of God reads like a novel, an odyssey-adventure of a free-spirited young men. He ran away from home at the age of 8, and grew up rather irresponsibly, enlisting finally at the age of 27 in military service. After serving in wars between Spain and France and in Hungary against the Turks, he became an overseer of slaves in Morocco, and then returned to Spain to tend sheep.

When he was 40 years old he came to the realization that he needed to change his life and he began to make amends for his dissolute behavior. He decided to go back to Africa, to ransom Christian slaves, and possibly be martyred. But realizing that he was not properly and spiritually motivated, he returned to Spain. There he earned his living by selling holy cards and books, opening a successful shop for this purpose in Grenada.

On the feast of St. Sebastian, January 20, 1538, which was a great annual festival in Genada, John heard a sermon by the powerful and famous preacher, St. John of Avila, spiritual director to St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross and others. He became so remorseful that he literally made a fool of himself by publicly beating himself, begging for a living and other wild behavior. As a result he was committed to a mental asylum for about a year. This same John of Avila visited him and advised him to be more concerned about the needs of the sick, the poor and the neglected and to be less harsh with himself.

John returned to his senses with great peace of heart and in 1539 began to work among the sick-poor. He received a lot of monetary support from the wealthy and attracted a number of followers because of his now healthy devout life and humility. Twenty years after his death these helpers formed the Brothers Hospitallers, or Brothers of St. John of God. John worked tirelessly for the sick for over ten years, and then became ill himself though he tried to hide it. Eventually he allowed a friend and admirer, Lady Anne Ossorio, to care for him. John died on

March 8, 1550; he was 55 years old. He was canonized in 1690.

There is a lesson in the life of this saint. He was a late bloomer as far as sanctity is concerned. His first real efforts began at age 40, which tells us that it is never too late to start. So often in commenting on the saints we begin by saying they were cradle saints. Here in John of God we have someone most of can identify with. We know we can change for the better, and a little push or shove in the right direction is all we need to take seriously the challenge of holiness. There is nothing in our past that should keep us from making more and stronger efforts, and there are so many opportunities around us for sanctity.

Let St. John of God speak to us:

"If we look forward to receiving God's mercy, we can never fail to do good so long as we have the strength. For if we share with the poor, out of love for God, whatever he has given to us, we shall receive according to his promise a hundredfold in eternal happiness. What a fine profit, what a blessed reward! Who would not entrust his possessions to this best of merchants, who handles our affairs so well? With outstretched arms he begs us to turn toward him, to weep for our sins, and to become the servants of love, first for ourselves, then for our neighbors. Just as water extinguishes a fire, so love wipes away sin." (From a letter; Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

ST. FRANCES OF ROME

Frances (1384-1440) lived in Rome and was "a woman of the home and of the world." Married at the age 13, she was a devoted wife for 40 years and raised three children. Throughout her life she found time for works of piety and charity. She was joined in this by her sister-in-law, Vannozza. Together they visited the poor and the sick of Rome, often in trying circumstances — during the plague and famine, as well as several invasions of the city by anti-papal factions.

After the death of her husband Frances entered the religious foundation of the Oblates of Mary, whom she had earlier organized as a group of women who lived at home, without vows. They were dedicated to helping the poor and the sick, particularly the most difficult cases. Frances' last years were marked by penance, which was sometimes very austere. Many came to her for advice and guidance, as well as for cures. Needless to say, she was loved by all.

We have two testimonies regarding her life. One is probably about three hundred years old, and is taken from a life written by Mary Magdalene Anguillaria, a member of Frances' community:

"God not only tested the patience of Frances with respect to her material wealth. . . He also tested her own body in a variety of ways, especially through long and serious illnesses which she had to undergo. And yet no one ever observed in her a tendency toward impatience. . . The gifts he conferred upon her were to be for the spiritual and physical advantage of her neighbor. For this reason he made her so lovable that anyone with whom she spoke would immediately feel captivated by love for her and ready to help her in anything she wanted." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

The second testimony is from a more recent critique, in the March 1985 issues of the newsletter, *Generation*:

“There is an obvious lesson in St. Frances’ life for women of all ages — men too for that matter; namely, that large as are the responsibilities of spousehood and parenthood, a person’s life is additionally enriched who finds time also for the suffering and the needy. For doing good is a quality not governed by definition of role. Frances of Rome was life and mother, still she managed to be deeply involved in the corporal works of mercy as a young and an old woman. She died at 56 and more than half a millenium later is a model yet of one able to balance home *and* the world.

The Opening Prayer of our Mass for this feast of St. Frances of Rome notes that in her, God has “given us a unique example of love in marriage as well as in religious life.” Other saints have done this as well — Elizabeth Ann Seton readily comes to mind. But today we ask through the intercession of St. Frances the grace to be faithful in God’s service, and to see and follow Jesus in all the aspects of life.

ST. PATRICK, BISHOP

Details of St. Patrick's life are few and uncertain, though legends abound. Patrick was born in Scotland, England or perhaps in Gaul about 385. Along with some slaves of his father he was captured and taken to Ireland and sold as a slave. He escaped to Gaul, and made his way back home. His preparation for priesthood seems to have been in Gaul, at Lerins; he was ordained about 417, and remained in Gaul for fifteen years. Consecrated bishop in 432, he went to Ireland and began to preach throughout the country, with great success. In his *Confession* he wrote:

"I came to the Irish people to preach the Gospel and endure the taunts of unbelievers, putting up with reproaches about my earthly pilgrimage, suffering many persecutions, even bondage, and losing my birthright of freedom for the benefit of others. . . If I am worthy, I am ready also to give up my life without hesitation and most willingly, for His Name."

Patrick made himself one of the people; he lived simply, learned their language and customs, respected their religious genius. The people were open to him and his challenging preaching. Patrick's efforts were so successful that within a century Irish monks were christianizing Europe. The foundation of St. Patrick's strength was a deep sense and experience of the presence of God and his constant prayer.

The following prayer is attributed to St. Patrick:

"May the strength of God guide me this day, and may his power preserve me.

May the wisdom of God instruct me; the eye of God watch over me; the ear of God hear me; the word of God give sweetness to my speech; the hand of God defend me; and may I follow the way of God.

Christ be with me, Christ before me,
Christ be after me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,

Christ at my right hand, Christ at my left,
Christ in the fort, Christ in the chariot,
Christ in the ship.
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks to me.
Christ in the eye that sees me.
Christ in the ear that hears me.

The 'how' and the 'why' of missionary activity was understood by St. Patrick and other pioneer missionary monks; they were stalwart heralds of the gospel. What we learned from them is acknowledged by the II Vatican Council in the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*: They established the Church "to offer all men the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God." They implanted the Church "in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the [people] among whom he lived." (n. 10).

The Council reminded us that the missionary work of the Church continues, and that the work of the pioneer missionaries must continue in us:

"Since the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization the fundamental task of the people of God, this sacred Synod invites all to undertake a profound interior renewal so that being vitally conscious of their responsibility for the spread of the Gospel they might play their part in missionary work among the nations.

"As members of the living Christ, incorporated into him and made like him by baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist, all the faithful have an obligation to collaborate in the expansion and spread of his Body, so that they might bring it to fullness as soon as possible." (*Ad Gentes*, nos. 35 & 36).

ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, BISHOP, DOCTOR

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386) was the greatest catechist among the early Fathers of the Church. He became Bishop of Jerusalem in the year 348. The persecutions at the hands of the pagans had ceased 35 years earlier, but Cyril still endured many hardships. The same was true of many other holy bishops and theologians, who suffered because of the Arians for several centuries. St. Cyril was sent into exile four times during his 38 years as Bishop of Jerusalem, the last exile lasting some eleven years.

Cyril's great contribution during his years as bishop was the series of instructions, the *Catechetical Lectures*; 24 in all, 19 are addressed to those preparing for baptism, and the remaining 5 are given to the newly baptised during Easter Week, explaining the sacraments they received. Precise and very correct, these instructions were meant also to counteract the Arian and other Christological heresies of his time. They are also a valuable source of information for the liturgy and baptism during the mid-fourth century.

In his Christology St. Cyril clearly teaches the divinity of Jesus, truly the Son of God, "begotten perfect. For what He is now, that has He been timelessly begotten from the beginning" (11th Catechesis). Such an affirmation of faith is important because it confirms the constant tradition of a correct, precise theology at a time of theological controversy. The Holy Spirit, too, is a distinct personality: "the only-begotten Son is, with the Holy Spirit, sharer in the Father's Godhead." (6th Catechesis).

The main theological interest of St. Cyril is the liturgy and the sacraments. The instructions are rich in theology, ritual detail and in explanation of symbolism. He clearly teaches that baptism remits sins and spiritually regenerates the soul. He is firmly convinced that one can be saved only by baptism or martyrdom:

"Unless a man receive baptism, he has no salvation,

excepting only martyrs, who receive the kingdom even though they have not entered the font. . . Martyrs make their profession of faith, 'Being made a spectacle to the world, and to angels and to men.' "

About the Holy Eucharist, Cyril clearly expresses belief in the Real Presence:

"What seems bread is not bread, though bread by taste, but the Body of Christ; and that what seems wine is not wine, though the taste will have it so, but the Blood of Christ. . . Contemplate therefore the bread and the wine not as bare elements, for they are, according to the Lord's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ; for though sense suggests this to thee, let faith establish thee. Judge not the matter from taste, but from faith be fully assured without mis-giving, that thou hast been vouchsafed the Body and Blood of Christ." (*Mystagogical Catechesis*, 4).

How the change of substances is brought about he illustrates from the change of water into wine at Cana:

"He once turned water into wine, at Cana in Galilee, at His own will, and shall we not believe Him when He changes wine into blood? (ibid).

In the last of his post-baptismal instructions we find the most highly developed concept of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. It is the clearest statement up to Cyril's time. He calls it a spiritual sacrifice, and unbloody propitiatory sacrifice offered in intercession for all in need and for the departed.

His list of needy closely resembles our present suggestions for inclusion in the prayer of the faithful: the peace of the church, tranquillity of the world, civil leaders, the sick, the afflicted, and supplication for the dead.

We honor St. Cyril of Jerusalem as a great pastor and teacher. His perseverance and courageous struggles in the face of heretical opposition and persecution are admired, and we further honor him for giving us "a deeper understanding of the mysteries of salvation." (Opening Prayer).

ST. JOSEPH, HUSBAND OF MARY

"There is a general rule concerning all special graces granted to any human being. Whenever the divine favor chooses someone to receive a special grace, or to accept a lofty vocation, God adorns the person chosen with all the gifts of the Spirit needed to fulfill the task at hand."

"This general rule is especially verified in the case of St. Joseph. . . He was chosen by the eternal Father as the trustworthy guardian and protector of his greatest treasures, namely, his divine Son and Mary, Joseph's wife." (St. Bernardine of Siena, Sermon 2 on St. Joseph; Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

The gospel passage for this solemnity is St. Matthew's account of the announcement to Joseph of the coming birth of Jesus. It makes St. Joseph the central and an active figure — Joseph is the recipient of a revelation and God communicates his will to him. The evangelist suggests that Joseph understood what was asked of him and without further questioning or doubt accepted the call of God. "When Joseph awoke he did as the angel of the Lord had directed him" (Matthew 1:24). Joseph was a man of faith.

Earlier in the history of God's people, Abraham took God at his word and believed. His faith was an act of confidence in God and an act of hope in a promise that only God could guarantee. Joseph, like Abraham, had only the barest knowledge about his vocation. Yet he accepted it with the same unquestioning faith, absolutely trusting God.

King David had intended to build a glorious temple to the Lord, but the prophet Nathan bore a message from God not to build a temple. Rather, God will build up for him a house, an everlasting dynasty, a throne firm forever. Prophetically we understand his words as a reference to Jesus Christ and his kingdom. The place of this reading in our celebration today serves also as a historical point of reference. Joseph was a descendant of David and a foster father of Jesus, and therefore

has a significant role in the establishment of His kingdom.

Our scripture lessons today teach us about faith and trust in God. Three figures are presented to us, each one an example of faith — David, Abraham and Joseph. Each one of them committed himself to an unknown without hesitation. The silence of the Scriptures regarding St. Joseph speaks eloquently of his faith. The few passages in which he is mentioned show him as a man going about the business of what God asked of him.

The short reading at evening prayer on this solemnity speaks to us of St. Joseph:

“Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being. Do it for the Lord rather than for men, since you know full well that you will receive an inheritance from him as your reward,” (*Colossians 3:23-24*).

Generally, we have some notion of what God wants of us after seeking guidance and advice. It may be clear to us how we are to go about doing his will, yet we need still faith and trust in God’s Providence as we face the future. In any adventure with God difficulties may be encountered, challenges will have to be met.

The events of sacred history are a source of encouragement, as we give ourselves unreservedly to God, and his purpose and will for us.

Our prayer today honors St. Joseph, “that just man, that wise and loyal servant whom [God] placed at the head of his family,” (*Preface of the Mass*), to cherish Mary and to watch over Jesus. We ask for Joseph’s watchfulness over the Church with the same care and unselfish love he gave to Mary and Jesus.

TURIBIUS OF MONGROVEJO, BISHOP

St. Turibius of Mongrovejo (1538-1606) was Archbishop of Lima, Peru. Born in Spain, he was educated in law. Later he taught law at the University of Salamanca, a noted theological center. Due to his brilliance he was appointed chief judge of the Inquisition at Grenada. He performed his office so well that he was chosen to fill the vacancy of the archbishopric in Lima, Peru. He objected that as a layman it was against the canons, but he was prevailed upon to accept the office. He was then ordained priest and bishop and set out for Peru, arriving in Lima in 1581, 43 years old.

The task facing him was enormous, but he set about carrying out the reforms mandated by the Council of Trent. He corrected the laxity of the clergy, sternly and courageously eradicating abuses. He spoke out against injustices and championed the cause of the poor. He worked tirelessly throughout the vast diocese, and endeared himself to all by his devotion, his teaching and his missionary zeal. Without hesitation he faced up to opposition. A story is told that when those he was correcting objected and explained their behavior as tradition, he replied: "Christ said, 'I am the truth'; he did not say, 'I am the custom.' "

St. Turibius would fit well the description of a diocesan bishop as given by the II Vatican Council in the *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church*. In n. 16 we read:

"In exercising his office of father and pastor the bishop should be with his people as one who serves, as a good shepherd who knows his sheep and whose sheep know him, as a true father who excels in his love and solicitude for all. . . He should so unite and mold his flock into one family that all, conscious of their duties, may live and act in the communion of charity."

St. Turibius fell ill early in 1606, in his twenty-fifth year as bishop, and he died on March 23. He was canonized in 1731 as a model of holiness, apostolic zeal and one unwavering in truth. (Cf. Opening Prayer).



ST. FRANCIS OF PAOLA, HERMIT

Francis of Paola (1416-1507) was taken to a Franciscan friary by his parents when he was 13 years old. There Francis learned to read, and he began the austere penitential practices that continued for the remainder of his life. A year later he accompanied his parents on a pilgrimage to Assisi and Rome, and upon returning he began his solitary life in a cave near the sea. He was 15 years old. Five years later he was joined by two young men, and that was the beginning of his Hermits of St. Francis of Assisi. Later the name was changed to the Order of Minims, as Francis himself explained, because he wanted them to be known as the least in the household of God.

Francis & his companions lived the contemplative life of hermits, which was solitary and very penitential. In addition to the traditional monastic vows they obligated themselves to a perpetual rigid fast, abstaining from all meat and dairy products. Penance, charity and humility formed the basis of their religious rule and practice. Because of his reputation for holiness, Francis was called often to settle disputes and offer advice. He also was blessed with the gift of miracles and prophecy.

After a long life of heroic mortification he was taken ill on Palm Sunday in 1507 and died on Good Friday, 91 years old. His penitential spirit is evident in his writings:

“Avoid evil, cast danger aside. . . Look after your spiritual well-being with judicious concern. Death is certain; life is short and vanishes like smoke. . . Put aside your hatred and animosity. Take pains to refrain from sharp words.”

Though the tone of his writing is austere, and possibly not appealing today, it is often practical and still relevant today. “Be peace-loving. Peace is a precious treasure to be sought with great zeal. . . Be converted with a sincere heart. Live your life that you may receive the blessing of the Lord.”

His penitential practices would be looked upon as extreme today, but for his time they were not that unusual. His spirit and his preoccupation with God in solitude have merit for all ages.

ST. ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, BISHOP, DOCTOR

The last of the Latin Fathers of the Church, Isidore's years (560-636) spanned a difficult period in Spain. The Visigoths had set up their own kingdom, and they were Arians. Isidore succeeded his brother St. Leander, as Bishop of Seville at the end of the century. Leander, 20 years older, had been his teacher, and was a demanding one. In addition to the learning he formed the character of Isidore.

Isidore was a prolific writer of history and theology, who was not highly original, but more than adequate. His theological compendium was used for about 900 years for the education of priests in Spain. As bishop he was energetic, involved in founding schools, and insisted that each diocese have a school. He urged a well-rounded education for priests, and wrote a rule for religious. He was responsible for the completion of the Mozarabic missal which is still in use at the Cathedral Church in Toledo, Spain. Through his efforts Arianism was overcome in Spain. His accomplishments laid the foundation for what is known as the Carolingian renewal. This marked the beginning of the Christian domination of Europe that began in the middle of the eighth century with Charlemagne.

His writings reveal his asceticism, which inclines to the practical, and from his *Book of Maxims* we read in today's Office of Readings:

"Prayer purifies us, reading instructs us. Both are good when both are possible. Otherwise, prayer is better than reading. . . Reading the holy Scriptures confers two benefits. It trains the mind to understand them; it turns man's attention from the follies of the world and leads him to the love of God. . . It is a less serious fault to be ignorant of an objective than it is to carry out what we do know. . . The man who is slow to grasp things but who really tries hard is rewarded; equally he who does not cultivate his God-given intellectual ability is condemned for despising his gifts and sinning by sloth. . . Learning unsupported by grace may get

into our ears; it never reaches the heart. It makes a great noise outside, but serves no inner purpose.

Reading his life and his writings endears this saintly doctor of the Church to us. The antiphon at the *Benedictus* for this feast of St. Isidore is appropriate and commends him to us: "Those who are learned will be as radiant as the sky in all its beauty; those who instruct the people in goodness will shine like the stars for all eternity."

May we "learn from his teaching, and benefit from his intercession." (Opening Prayer).

ST. VINCENT FERRER, PRIEST

Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419) entered the Dominican Order, was ordained priest, and became an ardent and energetic preacher. It was the time of the Western Schism — many claimants to the papacy, and even saints took sides.

Cardinal Peter de Luna (who had ordained Vincent) was a false claimant in Avignon, and he called Vincent to serve in his curia. After a short time the strain caused Vincent to become ill, and he left to continue his missionary preaching.

Eventually, the scandal of the schism worsened when there were three claimants to the papacy. The Council of Constance intervened, and one (a John XXIII) was deposed, another (Gregory XII in Rome) agreed to resign and the third, Peter de Luna (Benedict XII in Avignon), refused to resign. Vincent went to persuade his friend to acquiesce for the sake of unity in the Church. When he refused, Vincent denounced him at a public assembly, and then he fled for his life. Unity was restored with the election of rightful Gregory XII, in 1415, and Vincent was given much credit for the restoration.

For the last three years of his life he continued to preach. He died in 1419, greatly venerated by all and was canonized in 1455.

Much of his spiritual writing is addressed to priests, but we can all find something to take to heart:

“When you treat virtuous and sinful acts in your sermons and exhortations, use simple language and sensible idioms. Give apt and precise examples whenever you can. . . Your tone of voice should be that of a father. . . Abstract discourse on the virtues and vices hardly inspires those who listen. . . When hearing confessions, you should always radiate the warmest charity. . . Finally, if you want truly to help the soul of your neighbor, you should approach God first with all your heart. Ask him to fill you with charity, the greatest of all virtues; with it you can accomplish what you desire.”
(2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

St. Vincent did what we proclaim in the responsory to the reading. He preached in season and out of season; he refuted falsehood, corrected error, and called to obedience. He preached repentance to the people that they might turn to God.

ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE, PRIEST

"All men of whatever race, condition or age, in virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to education. This education should be suitable to the particular destiny of individuals. . . True education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult have a share." These are words from the II Vatican Council in the *Declaration on Christian Education*, (Gravissimum Educationis, n. 1, quoting in part from a radio message of Pius XII, December 24, 1942).

The saint whom we honor today, St. John Baptist de la Salle (1651-1719) dedicated his life to the education of young poor boys, obviously still a neglected class at his time. From a noble and wealthy family, scholarly and refined, he was also devout and began studies for the priesthood in his teens. He was ordained at age 27 and appointed canon at the Cathedral at Rheims. While there he met a layman, Adrian Nyel, who had come to Rheims to open a school for boys. John encouraged him and personally took an interest in the work. That incident eventually led to his founding of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

John's energies and resources were given to the work of educating the poor, and also the delinquent children of the wealthy. His charity and his perseverance enabled him to overcome disappointments and opposition, and in some cases overt hostility.

John Baptist de la Salle was an innovator, and it is interesting to note what were novel ideas in his day. Individual instruction was replaced by instruction in class; he insisted on silence and order in the classroom, and instructions were given in the vernacular (French) rather than in Latin.

Toward the end of his life he became ill, yet he still insisted on giving instruction in the classroom and continuing his austerities in his private life. He died on Good Friday, April 7, 1719,

67 years old. He was canonized in 1900, and in 1950 Pope Pius XII declared him patron of all school teachers.

In today's Office of Readings there is some advice for teachers from St. John Baptist de la Salle:

"The apostle Paul states that God has placed apostles, prophets and doctors (teachers) in the Church. If you meditate on this you will be convinced that you too have been given your special place. . . You should not doubt that you have been given the grace to teach [children], to instruct them in the gospel, and to form them in religion. This is a great gift from God. . . Let your students be moved by your untiring care for them and feel as though God were encouraging them through you. . . Above all, let your charity and zeal show how you love the Church."

Teachers of youth in our day need all the encouragement and support that we can give. The Church is ever mindful of the dignity of the calling to impart knowledge and lead young people to the wisdom of the gospel. In the former Breviary there was a reading on this feast, from a homily of St. John Chrysostom:

"What is more noble than the character of the young? I consider that he who knows how to form the youthful mind is truly greater than all painters, sculptors and all others of that sort."

Today we pray that God will give to his Church through the intercession of St. John Baptist de la Salle "teachers (and parents, too) who will devote themselves to helping. . . children grow as Christian men and women." (Opening Prayer).

ST. STANISLAUS, BISHOP, MARTYR

This saintly bishop, Stanislaus (1030-1079), is remembered for his vigorous opposition to unjust government. He was born near Cracow, Poland, and after being ordained a priest he became famous for his preaching and was sought out as a spiritual director. In the year 1071 he became the Bishop of Cracow.

Stanislaus was an outspoken critic of the King, Bolislaus II and upbraided him for his immorality and cruelty. The breaking point was reached when Stanislaus excommunicated the king for kidnapping the wife of a nobleman, and confining her to his castle. He personally rebuked the king for his scandalous behavior. When the king's soldiers refused to kill the bishop, Bolislaus did it himself while Stanislaus was offering Mass. The year was 1079.

St. Stanislaus is esteemed with other saints who stood up to the unjust and immoral behavior of monarchs: John the Baptist, Thomas Becket, Thomas More, and the early apologist martyrs who rebuked Roman emperors and governors. St. Stanislaus was canonized in 1253, and is revered in his country, especially in Cracow.

In the Office of Readings today we read from a letter of the courageous African Bishop-Martyr, Cyprian of Carthage:

"As we do battle and fight in the contest of faith, God, his angels and Christ himself watch us. How exalted is the glory, how great the joy of engaging in a contest with God presiding, of receiving a crown with Christ as judge. . . Let us arm ourselves with all our might, let us prepare ourselves for the struggle by innocence of heart, integrity of faith, dedication to virtue. . . Let us put on the breastplate of righteousness so that our hearts may be safeguarded, proof against the arrows of the enemy. Let our feet be protected by the shoes of the teaching of the Gospel. . . Let us with fortitude bear the shield of faith to protect us. . . The soldier of Christ, trained by Christ's commands and instructions,

does not begin to panic at the thought of battle, but is ready for the crown of victory.”

The holy bishop Stanislaus “engaged in combat even unto death. He feared no wicked threats; his faith was founded on solid rock.” (Responsory to 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

ST. MARTIN I, POPE, MARTYR

Known for his learning and piety, St. Martin I was elected pope in the year 649, a time of difficulty. The Church again had to struggle against a new heresy — monothelism, which denied that Jesus had both a human and a divine will, thus denying he had two complete and perfect natures.

Martin was vigorous in condemning this error at the Lateran Synod in 649. Infuriated, the Emperor Constans had Martin taken prisoner and brought to Constantinople. Already ill, he was further mistreated and humiliated, condemned and publically flogged. He died as a result of all this and more mistreatment in the year 656, the last of the popes to be honored as a martyr.

It was a painful time for St. Martin. From his confinement he wrote of his loneliness and expressed his trust in God:

“I am writing to you of things which do oppress us. . . I have been amazed and continue to be amazed at the lack of perception and the callousness of those who were once connected with me, both my friends and my relatives. They have all completely forgotten about my unhappy state, and do not care to know where I am, whether I am alive or dead.”

What had distressed Martin was that the Roman church had abandoned him and even elected a successor in his place, Eugene I, who is described as a mild and saintly man. Martin acquiesced, but Eugene proved to be ineffective, although he was revered for his goodness. He died about two years after St. Martin, and Eugene also is honored as a saint. Martin's trust in God and his acquiescence to Eugene's election is expressed in the same letter:

“God wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth through the prayers of Peter. Hence I pray that God will strengthen [all] in the orthodox faith, help them to stand firm against every heretic and enemy of the Church, and guard them unshaken. And I ask this especial-

ly for their shepherd (a reference to Eugene), now designated to be over them, that none may fall or go astray.” (Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Today we honor St. Martin I, whose faith could not be weakened by “hardship, pain nor the threat of death,” and we ask for “courage to endure whatever sufferings” may be inflicted upon us. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

The Liturgy of the Hours of the Eastern Church pays tribute to St. Martin I: “Glorious definer of the Orthodox faith. . .sacred chief of divine dogmas, unstained by error. . .true reprover of heresy. . .foundation of bishops, pillar of the Orthodox Faith, teacher of religion. . .Thou didst adorn the divine see of Peter, and since from this divine Rock, thou didst immovably defend the Church, so now thou art glorified with him.”

ST. ANSELM, BISHOP, DOCTOR

What St. Augustine was for the Church in the fifth century and subsequently, St. Anselm of Canterbury was for the eleventh century and thereafter. Both are noted for their originality and depth of thought. Like St. Augustine, Anselm was an original and an independent thinker, admired as a skillful teacher, patient and gentle as abbot and as bishop. Anselm's biographer, Eadmer, says that his whole life was characterized by "benevolence, kindness, love, gentleness, meekness, pardon, smiling exhortation." And these same characteristics are found in his writings.

These are the bare facts of his life: He was born in Piedmont in Northern Italy in 1033, and as a young man was indifferent toward religion, even though he wanted to enter a monastery at age 15. His father objected, so he went on as indifferent as before. Finally at age 27 he entered the famous Benedictine monastery at Bec in Normandy. Within three years he was prior, and fifteen years after that he was elected abbot. He was then 45 years old. At age 60 he became Archbishop of Canterbury.

Anselm is, so to speak, two men. He is a teacher of minds and a father of souls. As teacher, he influenced philosophy and theology. He believed, as Richard McBrien explains (Cf. *Catholicism*, p. 302, study ed.) "that the mystery of the Triune God is 'so sublime' that it transcends all the vision of the human intellect. . . It is enough for Anselm to be secure in the knowledge that God is, and that what we *do* know of God is 'without contradiction of any other reason.' " His best theological work is probably *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man), and he believed more in the compelling force of what he called "necessary reasons" than in an appeal to an authority. He preferred analogies to images.

Probably for most of us today, we are enriched by Anselm, the father of souls. As a spiritual father he is described as very traditional, very Benedictine, devoted to the Rule and to contemplation. As an ascetic theologian, theology is for him "faith seeking understanding." He wrote: "I believe that I may understand, and what is more I believe that unless I do believe, I shall not understand."

He wrote that to pray one must first withdraw or go apart: "Come now, little man, turn aside for a while from your daily employment, escape for a moment from the tumult of your thoughts. . . Enter into the inner chamber of your soul, shut out everything except God and that which can help you in seeking him, and when you have shut the door, seek him." (*Proslogion*, chap. 1, and *Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, trans. by Benedicta Ward, p. 239) The next step is to ask for the help of God. "Teach me to seek you." Anselm said of his writings on prayer: "I have written. . . from the viewpoint of someone trying to raise his mind to contemplation of God and seeking to understand what he believes."

A longer quotation from the *Proslogion* which is found in the Office of Readings today perhaps gives a better appreciation of the ascetical side of St. Anselm:

"Surely, Lord, inaccessible light is your dwelling place, for no one apart from yourself can enter into it and fully comprehend you. If I fail to see this light it is simply because it is too bright for me. . . This light in which you dwell, Lord, is beyond my understanding. It is so brilliant that I cannot bear it, I cannot turn my mind's eye toward it for any length of time. I am dazzled by its brightness, amazed by its grandeur, overwhelmed by its immensity, bewildered by its abundance. . . You are everywhere in your entirety, and yet I do not see you; in you I move and have my being, and yet I cannot approach you; you are within me, and yet I do not perceive you."

We are blessed that we have such rich thought to reflect on in our search for God. Like St. Anselm we pray that our faith will lead us to understanding of the sublime truths that God has revealed.

St. Anselm died in 1109 after ministering as Archbishop of Canterbury for 16 years. He vigorously defended the freedom of the Church against interference by monarchs. He was diligent in his care for the poor, and he was the first theologian to denounce the slave trade which he called the selling of men like cattle. He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1720. It is interesting to note, and it tells us of the lasting esteem for Anselm, that in Dante's *Paradiso* he is found among the spirits of light and power, next to St. John Chrysostom.

ST. GEORGE, MARTYR

That St. George was a martyr in Palestine about the year 303 is fact; the dragon-slaying is a legend. But the legend has captured the imagination of Christians everywhere. He is a favorite patron of England, and of many other countries, provinces and cities.

St. Peter Damian, an eleventh century Doctor of the Church and great preacher, managed a sermon about St. George without facts and without legend. In part he said:

"St. George was a man who abandoned one army for another: he gave up the rank of tribune to enlist as a soldier of Christ. Eager to encounter the enemy, he first stripped away his worldly wealth by giving all he had to the poor. Then, free and unencumbered, bearing the shield of faith, he plunged into the thick of battle, an ardent soldier for Christ.

"Clearly what he did serves to teach us a valuable lesson: if we are afraid to strip ourselves of our worldly possessions, then we are unfit to make a strong defense of the faith.

"As for St. George, he was consumed with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Armed with the invincible standard of the cross, he did battle with an evil king and acquitted himself so well that, in vanquishing the king, he overcame the prince of all wicked spirits, and encouraged other soldiers of Christ to perform brave deeds in his cause. . .

"Dear brothers, let us not only admire the courage of this fighter in heaven's army, but follow his example." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

A strong witness for Christ, St. George followed Jesus "in suffering death, so may he be ready to help us in our weakness." (Opening Prayer).



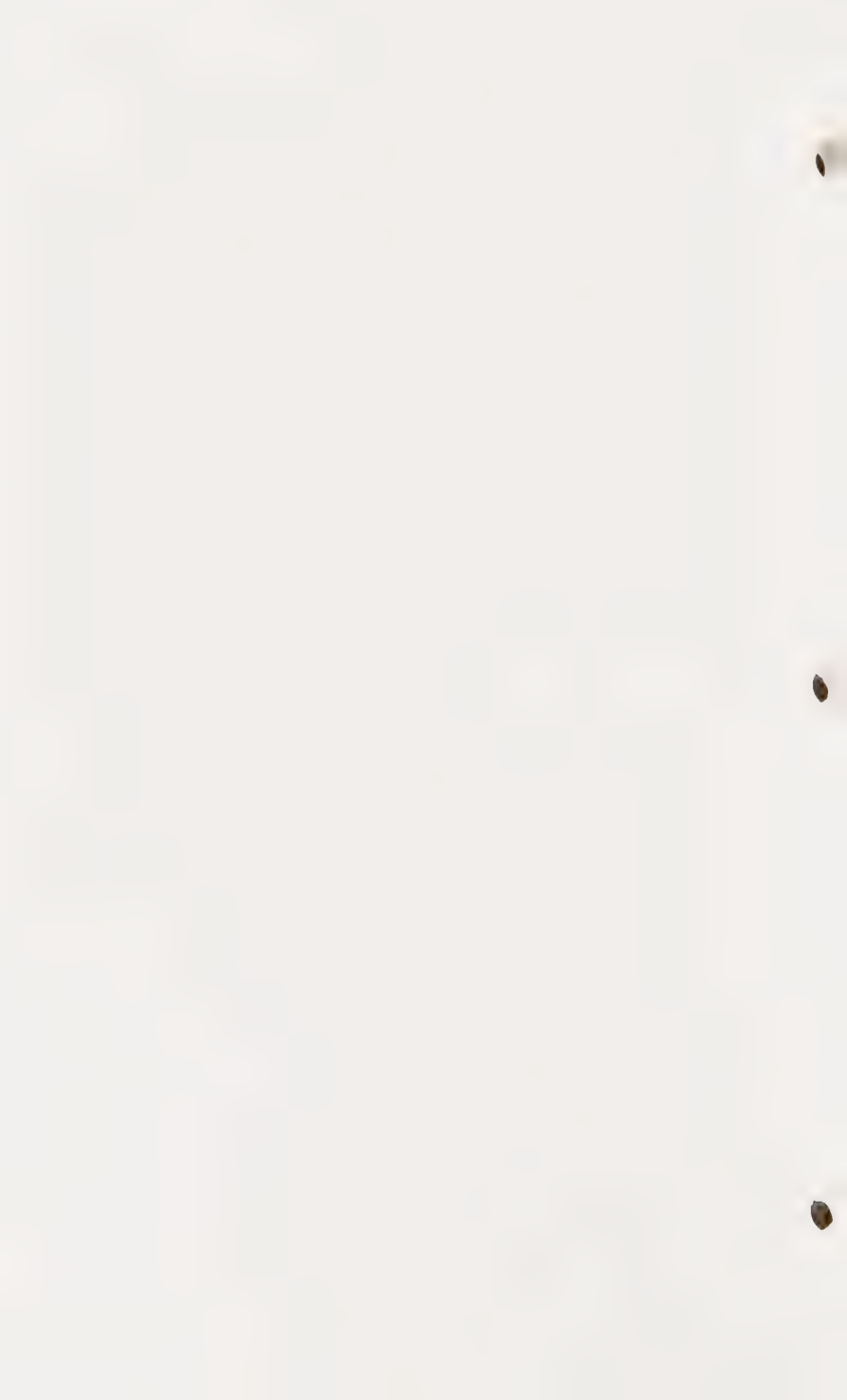
ST. FIDELIS OF SIGMARINGEN, PRIEST, MARTYR

Born in 1578, Fidelis studied law and throughout his practice took the cases of the poor and oppressed. After several years of frustration because of injustices, he abandoned his career in law and entered the Capuchins. Then he began a life of prayer and austere penance.

After his ordination to the priesthood he devoted his efforts to preaching to counteract heresy in Germany and Switzerland. He also confirmed his care of the sick and poor. While he was preaching, an attempt was made on his life, but he was uninjured. Later the same day he was attacked on his way home and murdered as he refused to denounce his faith. He was 46 years old. The first fruits of his martyrdom was the conversion of a Zwinglian minister who witnessed his death. Fidelis was canonized in 1746.

In the sermon at his canonization, Pope Benedict XIV said: Fidelis "practiced the fullness of charity in bringing consolation and relief to his neighbors as well as strangers. With a father's love he embraced all those who were in trouble. He supported great numbers of poor people with the alms he had collected. . .He comforted widows and orphans. . .He was always helping prisoners in their spiritual and bodily needs. He showed constant zeal in visiting and comforting the sick. . .He was faithful in truth as well as in name. His zeal for defending the Catholic faith was unsurpassed and he preached it tirelessly."

Pope John Paul II at a recent beatification of the English Martyrs (Nov. 22, 1987) said words that are equally appropriate to St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen: "A martyr is a person who, like Christ, bears witness to the truth. Still more, he or she is a person who bears witness to Christ who is himself the fulness of truth."



ST. MARK, EVANGELIST

The oldest and shortest of the gospels is attributed to Mark, a disciple of St. Peter. In the early second century a writer known as Papias of Hieropolis quoted an early presbyter: "When Mark became Peter's interpreter, he wrote down accurately, although not in order, all that he remembered of what the Lord had said or done." Papias then stated: "For [Mark] had not heard or followed the Lord, but later, as I said [heard and followed] Peter, who used to adapt his teaching to the needs [of the moment] without making any sort of arrangement of the Lord's oracles. Consequently, Mark made no mistake in thus writing down certain things as he remembered them. For he was careful not to omit or falsify anything of what he had heard." (*Eusebius, Ecclesiastical history* 3:39).

Mark, called John Mark in *Acts* 12:12 & 25, and referred to as "Mark, my son," in *I Peter* 5:13, was a Hellenic Jew in the Jerusalem Community, and a cousin of Barnabas (*Colossians* 4:10).

Mark's gospel tells us that the age of salvation prophesied in the Old Testament is here, "as in written in Isaiah the prophet." It begins with the preaching of John the Baptist, and is taken up by Jesus. Then it is continued by the disciples and entrusted to the Church as a mission, calling all to salvation. The call is one to repentance and a proclamation of good news, as Jesus proclaims God's kingdom. Furthermore, the ministry of Jesus is a revelation of his own identity. The kingdom of God will come about through Jesus' teaching and all are invited to be part of it. Even the miracles of Jesus are part of his teaching and announcement that the kingdom is here.

The disciples did not comprehend the mystery of Jesus' person any more than did the Pharisees or Jesus' own relatives and townspeople, except gradually. They came to some understanding and realization only at the first prediction of Jesus' passion and death. The Roman centurion on Calvary was the

first to grasp the meaning of what transpired: "Truly this man was the Son of God," (15:39). Only after the Ascension did the disciples go forth to preach. (16:20).

Today as we honor St. Mark who was privileged to proclaim the gospel, we ask "that we profit from his wisdom and follow Christ more faithfully." (Opening Prayer).

ST. PETER CHANEL, PRIEST, MARTYR

Peter Chanel (1803-1841) is the first martyr of Oceania and of the Society of Mary. He was murdered on the island of Futuna on April 28, 1841.

As a young priest, ordained in 1827, St. Peter effected a religious renewal in a parish that was badly in need of spiritual revitalization. He brought this about by his dedication to the care of the sick, and thereby won the hearts of the people. All the while he longed to be a missionary, and so four years later he entered the newly formed Society of Mary (Marists), hoping to realize his dream. He was first assigned to teach in the seminary, and after five years he was one of the first group to be sent to the South Pacific, to the islands called the New Hebrides. He was assigned to the island of Futuna, and was left there with a religious brother. Peter immediately set about winning the confidence of the people by caring for their sick. Success followed, arousing the jealousy of a chieftan. When his own son expressed a desire to be baptized, the chieftan ordered the murder of Peter.

We read from a sermon honoring St. Peter Chanel:

"Quietly he preached Christ and the Gospel, but there was little response. Still with invincible perseverance he pursued his missionary task on both the human and religious level, relying on the words of Christ: *There is one who sows and another who reaps*. And he constantly prayed for help from the Mother of God, to whom he was especially devoted.

"By his preaching of christianity he destroyed the cult of the evil spirits, which the chieftans of the Futunians encouraged to keep the tribe under their rule. . .

This led to his martyrdom.

"On the day before his martyrdom he had said: 'It does not matter if I die. Christ's religion is so deeply rooted on this island that it cannot be destroyed by my death.' "

The blood of this martyr was the seed. The entire island became Christian, and throughout Oceania today the Church flourishes. Peter Chanel was canonized in 1954.

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA, VIRGIN, DOCTOR

Catherine was born in Siena in 1347, and was the 23rd child of Jacopo and Lapa Benincasa. She was an intelligent, cheerful and religious young lady. At the age of 18 she entered the Dominican Third Order, spending the following three years in solitude, long hours in prayer, and in penance. Gradually she attracted followers among priests, religious and laity, whom she encouraged and guided in the spiritual life.

Catherine also took an active interest in public affairs of the Church. She was instrumental in having Pope Gregory XI return to Rome from Avignon. She supported his successor in Rome, Urban VI, against the Avignon faction.

Not very robust in health at any time, she suffered a stroke eight days before her death which occurred on April 29, 1380 at the age of 33.

In chapter 167 of her *Dialogues* we read:

“Eternal God, eternal Trinity, you have made the blood of Christ so precious through his sharing in your divine nature. You are a mystery as deep as the sea; the more I search, the more I find, and the more I find the more I search for you. But I can never be satisfied; what I receive will ever leave me desiring more.” (*Dialogues*; 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Throughout her life Catherine had mystical experiences, the first at age 6. These guided her life choices. She was also blessed with the stigmata. Her mystical teaching is found in the *Dialogues*, in her letters and in some two dozen prayers. Central to her theology is the redeeming Christ on the Cross and his blood which is poured out mercifully for all people. All of her writings reveal the mystic's hunger for God.

“When you fill my soul I have an even greater hunger, and I grow more famished for your light. I desire above all to see you, the true light, as you really are.” (*ibid*).

Catherine longed to surrender herself completely to God:

"I have tasted and seen the depth of your mystery and the beauty of your creation with the light of my understanding. I have clothed myself with your likeness and have seen what I shall be. Eternal Father, you have given me a share in your power and the wisdom that Christ claims as his own, and your Holy Spirit has given me the desire to love you." (ibid).

St. Catherine had difficulty with critics and slanderers, even to the point where she had to defend herself before a Dominican General Chapter. It is difficult to appreciate St. Catherine of Siena in so few minutes, but what Alois Maria Haas has written is a beginning:

"Mystical rapture in God always gave [Catherine] great certitude for quick action. The image of knightly battle inspired her, and she fought against ecclesiastical decadence through criticism, instruction, and preaching about poverty and obedience, the necessity of an uncompromising knowledge of self and of God, prudence, and the renunciation of self-love and egoism. In sum, it was a unique attempt to unite action and contemplation in a life dedicated to the good of the Church. Catherine's life was consumed by and offered up for the Church. The Church was her guarantor of the redeeming blood of Christ, the nursing mother of salvation. Her mysticism received from this a strong emphasis on the history and community of salvation." (*Christian Spirituality: high Middle ages and Reformation*, pp 167-168).

The Opening Prayer of the Mass sums up her life succinctly: "Father, in meditating on the suffering of your Son, and in serving your Church, Saint Catherine was filled with the fervor of your love." The Antiphon at the *Magnificat* in Evening Prayer adds: "Always and everywhere Catherine sought and found God. Through the strength of her love she entered into union with him."

St. Catherine of Siena was canonized in 1461. She was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970 by Pope Paul VI.

ST. PIUS V, POPE

Those of us who experienced the changes and the exhilaration of the mid and late 60's and the early 70's following the II Vatican Council can appreciate the pontificate of Pope St. Pius V.

Born in 1504, he entered the Order of St. Dominic and taught theology. Later he was bishop and cardinal, and was elected pope in 1566, three years after the close of the Council of Trent.

His was the task to implement the reforms mandated by that Council in order to bring about a renewal of fervor and discipline. This was no easy task since the Church had been painfully wounded by the Protestant revolt and reformation.

Pius V zealously enforced legislation against abuses, and insisted on the proper education and spiritual formation of priests. He took personal interest in reforming the liturgy, and in the publication of a new catechism; despite all these labors, he provided for the poor, the sick and needy of Rome. All this he accomplished in the face of hostility and opposition from civil governments.

The Church recognizes the charism of St. Pius V. A learned, prayerful, rigourously disciplined religious priest and bishop, his election to the papacy was a providential choice. The Opening Prayer of the Mass acknowledges: "Father, you chose St. Pius V as pope of your Church, to protect the faith and give you more fitting worship."

We are beneficiaries of many of the reforms that are due to the efforts of Pius V, and even more so of the changes and renewal of spirit in the Church that are the result of the II Vatican Council and the efforts of Pope Paul VI. We need zeal, courage and faith to live our commitment to Jesus Christ, and to take the gospel message to all who need the love of Jesus Christ.

ST. JOSEPH THE WORKER

The liturgical celebration in honor of St. Joseph the Worker dates back to 1955 when it was established by Pope Pius XII, and first celebrated the following year. Workers had long celebrated May 1 as May Day in honor of labor and as a symbol of their rights. It was the intention of Pius XII to give a christian dimension to this day, and to teach the dignity of human labor, with St. Joseph as a model for the laborer.

Appropriately in the Opening Prayer we note that God calls all of us "to develop and use [our] gifts for the good of others," and "with St. Joseph as our example and guide," we ask that God help us to do what is his will for us.

Joseph's role was that of protector and provider, God's "wise and loyal servant," for Mary and Jesus. Joseph was selflessly obedient to God, humble and quiet and perseveringly faithful.

We will be blessed if we use our particular talents and energies and opportunities for good. We will enjoy what we accomplish and grow in our love of God and our gratitude to him.

The II Vatican Council takes note of the dignity of human labor in *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world*:

"We believe by faith that through the homage of work offered to God man is associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, whose labor with his hands at Nazareth greatly ennobled the dignity of work. This is the source of everyman's duty to work loyally as well as his right to work." (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 67).

The good we accomplish and the fruit of our work reflect the goodness and the creative genius and infinite power of God. What we gain from learning and experience reflects the wisdom of God.

Pope John Paul II said: "Work. . . is a blessing from God who calls man to rule the earth and transform it, so that the divine

work of creation may continue with man's intelligence and effort."

ST. ATHANASIUS, BISHOP, DOCTOR

St. Athanasius was born at the end of the third century (about 295) in Alexandria, Egypt. He was educated, ordained a deacon and three years after the Council of Nicea at which he played a leading role, he was named Bishop of Alexandria. At the Council of Nicea (in the year 325), Athanasius, then a deacon, became the great champion of the faith against Arianism. Johannes Quasten wrote of him: "Of undaunted courage, unflinching in the face of danger or adversity, and cowed by no man, he was the steadfast champion and great defender of the faith at Nicea." (*Patrology*, v. 3, p. 20). Cardinal John J. Wright said that he was "one very great bishop who took his stand against the nonsense of the hour."

Hated and feared by the Arians who taught that Jesus was only the adopted Son of God, they used all kinds of detractions and calumny to destroy him. Five times he endured exile from his episcopal see, for a total of seventeen years. "But all his sufferings could not break his resistance. He was convinced that he fought for the truth. . . Despite his uncompromising hostility towards error and the fierceness with which he opposed it, he had the quality, rare in such a character, of being capable, even in the heat of battle, of tolerance and moderation towards those who had in good faith been led astray." (J. Quasten, *Op. cit.* p. 20).

We appreciate this outstanding doctor of the Church not just for his teaching against heresy, but for his other contributions as well. He wrote the biography of St. Anthony the hermit, in which we learn of the beginnings of the monastic movement. His letters are important historical and often doctrinal documents. His spiritual comments are practical, and theologically we see the beginnings of an incarnational spirituality. In a sermon on the Incarnation of the Word we read:

Jesus "utterly destroyed the power death had against mankind — as fire consumes chaff — by means of the body he had taken and the grace of the resurrection. This is the reason why the Word assumed a body that could die, so

that this body, sharing in the Word who is above all, might satisfy death's requirement in place of all."

For St. Athanasius, the Church is the instrument through which salvation is transmitted. It is the Church that forms the believing community "into a liturgical, institutional, and theological celebration of the divine incarnation."

"An outstanding defender of the truth of Christ's divinity," (Opening Prayer), Athanasius is a prototype of the great bishops of the fourth and fifth centuries. These were men and saints like Basil, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine. They were learned, pastoral and responsive to the needs and challenges of the times. They were bishops, who after the Scriptures, are transmitters of divine revelation.

The II Vatican Council in the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* reminds us:

"This magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devoutly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully." (*Dei Verbum*, n. 10)

The Council goes on to call this "the supremely wise arrangement of God."

After his fifth exile St. Athanasius was called back to his see when the people threatened a revolt. By then Athanasius had been vindicated, and the emperor, fearing the people, recalled him.

The last eleven years of his life were spent in peace. He died May 2, 373, and is revered and honored as one of the great figures of christianity.

STS. PHILIP AND JAMES, APOSTLES

From the gospels we know St. Philip as one of the twelve apostles. His name appears in all four lists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts). He came from Bethsaida in Galilee, was called by Jesus himself, and in turn brought Nathaniel (Bartholomew) to Jesus. In the gospel of John it is Philip who engages in a brief exchange with Jesus on the occasion of the multiplication of loaves (Jn. 6:5, 7). Also, it was Philip who was approached by some Hellenistic Jews who wanted to be introduced to Jesus. Fr. John L. McKenzie suggests that he was regarded as being closely associated with Jesus. Of his later life we know nothing.

St. James, the cousin of the Lord, son of Alphaeus, is also mentioned in the same four lists of apostles. Sometimes he is referred to in literature as James the less, or James the younger, to distinguish him also from James, "brother of the Lord," who is scholarship, agreeing with the ancient Fathers and eastern liturgy distinguish him also from James, "brother of the Lord," who is also mentioned in the gospels (Mt. 13:55 and Mark 6:3, and in Acts 12:17 as the bishop of the Jerusalem community, martyred at 62, author of the *Letter of James*). Western liturgy identifies St. James as bishop of Jerusalem and author of the letter. As in the case of Philip, depending on whether we agree with the eastern tradition or western tradition, either we know nothing of his future ministry or we recognize him as the leader of the Jerusalem community.

The II Vatican Council in the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* recalls for us the role of the apostles:

"From the beginning of his ministry the Lord Jesus 'called to himself those whom he wished and he caused twelve of them to be with him and to be sent out preaching'. . . Thus the apostles were both the seeds of the new Israel and the beginning of the sacred hierarchy. Later, before he was assumed into heaven. . . the Lord, who had received all power in heaven and on earth. . . founded his Church as the sacrament of salvation, and just as he had been sent by the

Father. . .so he sent the apostles into the whole world. . .
Hence the Church has an obligation to proclaim the faith
and salvation which comes from Christ. . .

“This task which must be carried out by the order of
bishops, under the leadership of Peter’s successor and with
the prayers and cooperation of the whole Church, is one
and the same everywhere and in all situations.” (*Ad gentes*,
nos. 5 & 6).

The task of proclaiming “the faith and salvation which comes
from Christ” is now ours. Pope John Paul II, in his homily in San
Francisco, September 18, 1987, said: “The Gospel, and together
with it the salvific power of Christ’s redemption, is addressed to
every person in every nation. . .To be christian. . .means to
proclaim this message untiringly in every generation.”

The commission given to the apostles to “make disciples of all
nations,” is now our commission.

ST. NEREUS AND ACHILLEUS, MARTYRS

Two first century martyrs are honored today, Nereus and Achilleus, both soldiers, who gave up their military careers upon becoming christians. They were then condemned to death; one tradition says by beheading, another by being burned to death. We honor them "for their courage in dying to profess their faith in Christ." (Opening Prayer).

They were buried in a cemetery on the Ardeantine Way where a basilica was built in their honor. In the fourth century Pope St. Damasus wrote an epitaph for their tombstone at their place of burial. It reads:

"The martyrs Nereus and Achilleus had enrolled themselves in the army and exercised the cruel office of carrying out the orders of the tyrant, being ever ready, through the constraint of fear, to obey his will. O miracle of faith! Suddenly they ceased from their fury, they became converted, they fly from the camp of their wicked leader; they throw away their shields, their armor and their blood-stained javelins. Confessing the faith of Christ, they rejoice to bear testimony to its triumph. Learn now from the words of Damasus what great things the glory of Christ can accomplish."

Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote: "No one is a martyr for a conclusion, no one is a martyr for an opinion; it is faith that makes martyrs."

ST. PANCRAS, MARTYR

Though we know little about St. Pancras, his memory is cherished by the Church. It is known that he died for Christ, and according to some sources he was brought to Rome from Syria or Phrygia as an orphan. When he was 14 years old he was martyred by being beheaded, about the year 304.

Commenting on the presence of God in time of tribulation, St. Bernard wrote:

"It is good for me to be sad, O Lord, as long as you are with me, rather than to be a king apart from you, to feast without you, to boast without you. It is better for me to embrace you in tribulation, to have you with me in the furnace, than to be without you in heaven. *For what do I have in heaven apart from you? What have I desired on earth? Gold is tested in the furnace, and the just by the trial of tribulation.* There, yes there, you are present with them, Lord. You are there in the midst of those gathered in your name, as you were once with the three young men in the fiery furnace.

"Why are we afraid, why do we hesitate, who do we flee from this furnace? The fire rages, but the Lord is with us in tribulation. *If God is with us who can be against us?* And if he then rescues us, who will steal us from his hand? Lastly, if he honors us, who can dishonor us? If he honors us, who can humiliate us? (Sermon on Psalm 91, *Qui habitat; Vulgate, Ps. 90*).

ST. MATTHIAS, APOSTLE

The only mention of St. Matthias in Scripture is in the Acts of the Apostles. The passage we read tells us how he came to be numbered among the apostles (Acts 1:15-26). Determined by lot, "the choice fell to Matthias, who was added to the eleven apostles."

Legend says that Matthias preached in Judea, Cappadocia (present day Turkey) and on the shores of the Caspian Sea, where he was martyred.

The Opening Prayer of the Mass says that St. Matthias was called by the Father "to share in the mission of the apostles." That mission was to give witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Peter said to the disciples — about 120 were gathered together — that one of their company should be named as witness with the apostles to Jesus' resurrection.

St. John Chrysostom explained this passage in a homily: "Peter did not say 'a witness to the rest of his actions' but only a 'witness of the resurrection.'" The rest of Jesus' actions, the signs and wonders were known by general admission. Many disciples and non-disciples witnessed these; they had taken place openly. "But the resurrection took place secretly." Peter prayed that the Lord make his choice known, for as St. John Chrysostom said "they did not think themselves worthy to make the choice of their own accord, and therefore they wanted some sign for their instruction."

So, we are to understand that the call to be an apostle is a privileged grace, a call by God, and act of God. Our call to the christian life is also specific and personal. At baptism we are called by name, and we are to continue the mission of the apostles and be witnesses to Christ today. Our faith in the resurrection of Jesus gives meaning and significance to our lives. We have been chosen "to go forth and bear fruit."

ST. ISIDORE THE FARMER

Born in Madrid, Spain, of poor parents, Isidore (1070-1130) worked throughout his life on the farm of a wealthy landowner. His life and labor were shared with his wife, also a saint, Maria de la Cabeza. Both Isidore and Maria were humble, simple, noted, too for his kindness to animals. He was canonized in 1622. Isidore and his saintly wife teach us that sanctity is not a matter of status, and that it is not incompatible with physical labor.

We here in the United States appropriately honor St. Isidore the Farmer because our land is abundantly blessed with good and rich harvests of food. Isidore's sharing reminds us of the obligation we have to share our blessings with others.

The Opening Prayer of the Mass in honor of St. Isidore makes us aware of the good of all creation and blessings of the fruit of the land, we are asked to serve God by caring for the gifts that surround us. We are especially reminded to share our food with the hungry.

The II Vatican Council in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* tells us that:

"Human work. . .proceeds from the human person, who as it were impresses his seal on the things of nature. . .By his work a man ordinarily provides for himself and his family, associates with others. . .and renders them service; he can exercise genuine charity and be a partner in the work of bringing divine creation to perfection. Moreover, we believe by faith that through the homage of work offered to God man is associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, whose labor with his hands at Nazareth greatly ennobled the dignity of work. (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 67).

Let us pray today through the intercession of St. Isidore that what we have recently planted in our lands may yield a rich and abundant harvest. We also resolve to thank God, and assist all who are in need of food. Let us pray that as a nation we will

always willingly and graciously share the blessings given to us by
a kind and loving God.

ST. JOHN I, POPE, MARTYR

In the early part of the sixth century the Church was still plagued by the Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Jesus. However, by that time the heresy was kept alive more by the support of civil government than by any attraction to the error itself.

When the elderly and ill John became Bishop of Rome in 523, Theodoric, a Goth, was king of Italy. He was an Arian, but was tolerant of the faithful Christians. On the other hand, the emperor Justin in Constantinople was harsh toward the Arians. John was sent by Theodoric along with several ministers of the court to convince the emperor to be more tolerant of Arians.

While some compromise may have been reached, the outcome of the mission remains unclear. Theodoric was envious and angry at the grand and gracious reception given to John as Bishop of Rome by both the emperor and the patriarch of Constantinople. He also was suspicious of his ministers, some of whom he had executed. John was imprisoned at Ravenna on his return, already ill, and he died of mistreatment in 526. He is honored as a martyr.

For a reflection we turn to the *Constitution on the Church*: "Since Jesus, the Son of God, showed his love by laying down his life for us, no one has greater love than he who lays down his life for him and for his brothers. . . Some Christians have been called from the beginning, and will always be called, to give this greatest testimony of love to all, especially to persecutors. Martyrdom makes the disciple like his master, who willingly accepted death for the salvation of the world, and through it he is conformed to him by the shedding of his blood. Therefore the Church considers it the highest gift and supreme test of love. And while it is given to few, all however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the cross amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks." (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 42).

ST. BERNARDINE OF SIENA, PRIEST

"The name of Jesus is the glory of preachers because the shining splendor of that name causes his word to be proclaimed and heard." (Sermon 49 "The Glorious Name of Jesus Christ"). As a preacher St. Bernardine (1380-1444) is best known for his devotion to the holy name of Jesus. For him the name Jesus spans the whole history of salvation, and so there is in his name a spirituality of human and personal history. This particular devotion appreciates the humanity of Jesus, which is found in other Franciscan preachers as well, especially St. Bonaventure.

In his time, St. Bernardine of Siena greatly influenced the popular piety of the people. Their devotion was learned largely from preachers like Bernardine. Hearing sermons was a large part of their devotional life which included the saying of prayers, fasting, almsgiving, penitential practices and the making of pilgrimages. The sermons of itinerant mendicant preachers exhorted their listeners to such a way of life.

St. Bernardine was the most influential preacher in the first half of the fifteenth century. He had entered the Franciscans at the age of 22, after spending several years caring for the sick during the plague. He became a priest two years later and spent the next twelve years living a contemplative life in solitude and in prayer. He began his ministry of preaching about 1415, travelling throughout Italy. His preaching was interrupted in 1430 when he was elected the General Vicar of the Friars of the Strict Observance, an office he held for twelve years. During that time he did much to enhance the spiritual and intellectual life of the membership which grew from 300 to over 4000.

In the final years of his life he returned to preaching, but already ill and in failing health he died on the way to Naples in 1444, 64 years old. He was canonized six years later.

St. Bernardine's special love for the holy name of Jesus is evident in these words from his sermon: "Jesus, O glorious name, O gracious name, O lovely and worthy name. Through

you sins are wiped away, adversaries are overcome, the sick are delivered, those suffering trials and strengthened are consoled.”

In his own life he experienced that strength and consolation. During his preaching ministry he endured harrassment and accusations, arrest by papal order, and was forbidden to preach. He suffered and prayed in solitude, and when vindicated he preached with renewed intensity. He frequently was able to reach even the most hardened and embittered souls. The old Breviary notes that he “excelled in humility, patience and other virtues,” and that by his preaching “he put an end to civil disorders everywhere, and restored fallen piety and morals by his word and example.”

In his sermon on the Holy Name of Jesus, St. Bernardine said that the name of Jesus “must be proclaimed, that it may shine out and never be suppressed. But it must not be preached by someone with sullied mind or unclean lips, but stored up and poured out from a chosen vessel.”

St. Bernardine is such a chosen vessel.

ST. BEDE THE VENERABLE, PRIEST, DOCTOR

St. Bede (672-754) was a Benedictine monk and priest in the late 7th and early 8th century. He was a scripture scholar, historian and teacher, and is recognized by the Church with the title "doctor," an acknowledgement of his learning and influence. Bede said of himself: "My special joy was always study, teaching and writing." This he did while living the monastic life, faithfully observing its rule.

One cannot point to any great events in his life and career, but he has left his mark and influence on church history and English literature. He was a devoted student of the Sacred Scriptures, and what was worth knowing at his time, Bede knew. His outstanding contribution to scholarship and Catholic learning is his history about the English or Anglo-Saxon Church and people, which he completed in 751, a few years before his death (754). His title, "the Venerable," speaks to us of his wisdom and learning, and of the respect given him.

Though dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, he was possessed of a profound spirituality, and was aware of the neglect of the sacraments by the people of his day. He encouraged greater devotion and daily reception of the Holy Eucharist. He knew his own strength and ability came from prayer which enabled him to find God in his scholarly pursuits as well as in the wonders of creation. We have no difficulty relating to this 8th century saint and scholar.

As a teacher he believed that it was not enough to pass on his knowledge. He would have us understand that religious and secular knowledge must have an influence on how we live. Our lives must be lived in gratitude to God and for the good of others.

From St. Bede we learn to appreciate our special gifts and learn to use these talents and graces to enhance our relationship with God and others. As historian he shows that learning from past

experience can affect our future.

In our prayer at Mass on this day we proclaim that the Church has been enriched by St. Bede's learning, and we ask that we may "learn from his wisdom and benefit from his prayers."

ST. GREGORY VII, POPE

"Give us the spirit of courage and love for justice. . . Make us courageous in condemning evil." These words are taken from the Opening Prayer of Mass for the Feast of St. Gregory VII. They could appropriately be incorporated into an epitaph for this saint who struggled to keep the Church free from domination by secular political authority.

Hildebrand, who later became Pope Gregory VII, spent his life as a monk, and papal emissary. Then as pope, he realized that to do the work of God, to be a prophetic channel for God, the Church must be free to speak out courageously for justice, and be unrelenting in condemning evil. This is something that we can appreciate in this latter half of our present century. Today the Church stands out, almost alone, as defender and champion of the poor and oppressed in many lands. It is a teacher of the sacredness of and respect for life, and a promoter of the brotherhood of mankind, and of peace and unity in our world. Therefore we can appreciate the problems that Pope Gregory VII had to deal with, and can see a parallel between Gregory's efforts and the social teachings of the popes of our century.

Religion and politics are frequently at odds. Ideally, there is nothing to prevent harmony between the two, but in reality and experience it has not happened. Whenever a mix is attempted and complacency allowed to set in, religion has been the loser. Then The Church finds it difficult to be the defender of the needy, the oppressed and those discriminated against.

As monk and confidant of many late eleventh century popes who attempted reforms, Hildebrand eventually succeeded to that office as Gregory VII. He vigorously defended the rights of the Church as servant and refuge of the people. He called to account emperors and kings, and fought against simony. He realized that the Church needed bishops who were churchmen rather than political pawns, if the Church were to succeed as God's instrument for the spiritual good of the people.

In a letter, Gregory wrote:

“By God’s will Mother Church placed me in my unworthiness (and God knows that I was unwilling, too) upon the apostolic throne, and there with all my powers I have tried to see that the holy Church, the bride of God, our lady and mother, might return to the beauty which is rightly hers and remain free, chaste and catholic.”

For this cause, Gregory suffered harassment and persecution, finally dying in exile, ill because of the intensity of his struggles.

“But, because this so greatly displeases our ancient foe, he has armed his minions against us so that they might overturn all our efforts. What he has been unable to do from the days of Constantine the Great he now does against us and particularly against the Apostolic See. Do not be surprized that, as time goes on, he will fight all the harder to wipe out the Christian religion.”

Gregory’s own efforts were vindicated some forty years after his death. The ideas for which he struggled were to prevail through his successors and helped shape Western Christendom.

Pope St. Gregory VII stands out as a true reformer, a very spiritual man, who was convinced that he had to be a prophet for God. He was in the best tradition of the prophets of Israel, and like St. John the Baptist in his time, he struggled for what was right and on behalf of the oppressed. He was like Jesus, courageous and loving for justice’s sake.

ST. MARY MAGDALENE DE PAZZI, VIRGIN

A short introductory paragraph in the *Liturgy of the Hours* for this feast of St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi (1568-1607) tells us: "She led a solitary life of prayer and self-denial, prayed fervently for Church reform and directed her fellow sisters on the road to perfection."

She was a member of a cloistered Carmelite community in Florence, Italy. The Church of her time struggling with the problems of the Reformation and the reforms mandated by the Council of Trent. She became ill as a novice, and was very close to death when she was granted mystical experiences. Afterwards she was able to communicate insights into divine truths through her writings. Through letters to the pope and others in the Church she encouraged efforts for the reform of the Church.

She was very devout in her cloistered life of prayer, and throughout her life she suffered much, physically and spiritually. Her spiritual sufferings were due to temptation and spiritual dryness, but she persevered, with strong faith and charity.

An excerpt from her writings which we read in the Office of Readings today shows her marvellous understanding of how God reveals Himself to us:

"You do not, O Holy Spirit, stand still in the unmoved Father or in the Word, and yet you are always in the Father and in the Word and in yourself and in all blessed spirits and creatures. You are the friend of the created because of the blood shed by the only-begotten Word, who in the greatness of his love made himself the friend of the created. You find rest in creatures who are prepared to meet you, so that in the transmission of your gifts they take on, through purity, their own particular likeness to you. You find rest in those creatures who absorb the effects of the blood of the Word and make themselves a worthy dwelling place for you."

Today we pray that we may follow the example of purity and charity of St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi who was filled with heavenly gifts and the fire of God's love. (Opening Prayer).

ST. PHILIP NERI, PRIEST

Love of others, simplicity of life and joyous service of God would accurately describe the life and spirit of St. Philip Neri (1515-1595), priest and friend of the young. Philip also had a great love for the sick and the poor, sharing their lot in order to be close to them on the streets of Rome. His was an apostolate of the streets with particular interest in the young rowdies, impoverished artists, and shopkeepers. He worked to help them improve themselves materially and to appreciate spiritual things as well. After a busy day on the streets, he very often spent the night in prayer.

Philip was possessed of great insight and power of persuasion. He was sought out as a confessor and spiritual director by the wealthy and the poor. He was consulted by popes, bishops and rulers, as well as by his beloved poor, the sick, and the street people.

His spirit of joyful service inspired the priests who joined him in the Congregation of the Oratory which he founded in 1564. The prayer over the gifts at Mass asks that in imitation of Philip God will "keep us always cheerful in our work," for his glory and the good of others.

This holy priest knew that a zealous activity must be supported by a genuine and prayerful commitment to Jesus Christ, and an appreciation of the sacraments. In the prayer after communion we ask for strength from the Holy Eucharist, and that like Philip we might hunger "after this sacrament in which we find true life." Philip wrote: "If you wish for something apart from Christ, you do not know what you are wishing for. If you long for something apart from Christ, you do not know what you are longing for. If you work apart from Christ, you do not know what you are doing."

Philip, by his life and example, by his joyfulness and spiritual resources, was able to overcome indifference and spiritual malaise in the society of his time.

Taking to heart the preaching, the advice and spirit of St. Philip Neri, we can be sparks of genuine Christian life in the secular society of our day. Let us ask in prayer: "Father. . .in your love kindle in us the fire of the Holy Spirit who so filled the heart of Philip Neri." (Opening Prayer at Mass).

ST. AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY, BISHOP

Augustine, a Roman monk, and a group of about thirty other monks were sent to evangelize Britian by Pope Gregory the Great in 596. Gregory himself had wished to be a missionary to those lands.

Even before reaching England, the missionaries heard stories of the ferocity of the Anglo-Saxons and they turned back. But reassured they set out a second time and upon reaching England they were welcomed by King Ethelbert whose wife was a Christian. Their work was difficult, but patiently they labored, heeding the advice of Pope Gregory whose enlightened principles counselled them to make adaptations. He encouraged them to use their temples rather than destroy them; to adapt pagan celebrations to Christian feasts, and to use local customs when possible.

King Ethelbert himself was baptized, and some measure of success was achieved. Pope Gregory wrote to Augustine expressing his joy:

“Who. . . is capable of describing the great joy of believers when they have heard what the grace of Almighty God and your own cooperation achieved among the Angels? They abandoned the errors of darkness and were bathed with the light of holy faith. With full awareness they trampled on the idols which they had previously adored with savage fear. They are now committed to Almighty God. . . God chose illiterate preachers and sent them into the world in order to show the world that conversion is brought about not by men’s wisdom but rather by his own power. So in like manner God worked through weak instruments and wrought great things among the Angles.” (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

By the time of his death in the year 604 the results of the labor of St. Augustine and his monks were lasting.

The feast day of these ancient missionaries reminds us that evangelization must continue as the Church strives to carry the message of salvation to all people. The *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* reminds missionaries to be cognizant of the goodness of peoples, their particular customs and cultures, and to purify them rather than destroy what can be built upon. And the Council's teaching is what we all need to hear and to learn as we all share the task of the missionary:

"Missionary activity is nothing else, and nothing less than the manifestation of God's plan, its epiphany and realization in the world and in history; that by which God through mission, clearly brings to its conclusion the history of salvation. Through preaching and the celebration of the sacraments, of which the Holy Eucharist is the center and summit, missionary activity makes Christ present, He who is the author of salvation." (*Ad gentes*, n. 9).

Today we pray through the intercession of St. Augustine of Canterbury that the "fruits of his work continue in [the] Church." (Opening Prayer).

ST. JUSTIN, MARTYR

Justin was a philosopher and martyr, an important early second century apologist, and "one of the noblest personalities of early Christian literature." He is the "first ecclesiastical writer who attempts to build a bridge between Christianity and pagan philosophy." (J. Quasten, *Patrology*, v. 1, p. 196 & 198).

Justin pursued truth, investigated many philosophies of his day, but found none of them convincing or satisfying. Therefore his quest for truth led him to Christianity. He admired the strength shown by the martyrs when faced with death, and he wrote later "I both prayed and strove with all my might to be found a Christian." After his conversion he devoted himself to the defense of the Christian faith.

An authentic account of his martyrdom is preserved, and we read it in the Second Lesson in the *Liturgy of the Hours*. Justin confessed his faith in Jesus Christ and answered questions put to him at his trial: "Yes, I am a Christian. . . I hope that I shall enter God's house if I suffer. . . For I know that God's favor is stored up until the end of the whole world for all who have lived good lives . . . No one who is right-thinking stoops from true worship to false worship. . . We do not offer sacrifice to idols."

Our first reading for Mass today (I Cor. 1:18-25) asks: "Where is the wise man to be found? Where is the scribe? Where is the master of wordly argument? Has not God turned the wisdom of this world into folly?" St. Justin answered these questions and knew the truth. Justin understood "the sublime wisdom of Jesus Christ. . . rejected falsehood" and remained "loyal to the faith." (Opening Prayer). He proclaimed it "without fear or shame." (Cf. Entrance Antiphon).

On this his feast day we pray for that same grace.

STS. MARCELLINUS AND PETER, MARTYRS

An indication of the esteem in which the fourth century martyrs, Marcellinus and Peter, are held in the Roman Church is the fact that they are mentioned in Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon.

Marcellinus was a priest, and Peter an exorcist. They were beheaded in the first years of the fourth century, probably in 303, for making converts to Christianity.

Their importance to the Roman community of that time is indicated by the fact that their tomb was inscribed by Pope Damasus and a church was built in their honor by Constantine.

A thought for today as we commemorate these martyrs is found in the Office of Readings. It is from an *Exhortation to Martyrdom* by Origen: "We should be extremely eager to share in Christ's sufferings and to let them be multiplied in us if we desire the superabundant consolation that will be given to those who mourn. This consolation will not perhaps be the same for all, for if it were, Scripture would not say: 'The more we share in the sufferings of Christ, the more we share in his consolation.' (Cf. 2 Cor. 1:7). Sharing in his consolation will be proportionate to our sharing in his suffering, according to St. Paul, and Origen continues:

"In Christ and with Christ the martyrs disarm the principalities and powers and share in his triumph over them, for their share in Christ's sufferings makes them sharers also in the mighty deeds those sufferings accomplished," (Origen, *Op Cit*).

JUNE 3

ST. CHARLES LWANGA & COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

The Ugandan martyrs

Twenty-two martyrs are honored on this day, led by Charles Lwanga, master of pages at the royal court of King Mwanga, whose immorality was censured by Charles and others. Among the martyrs were pages, a catechist, judges and chief, cruelly murdered. From the accounts of their deaths we know they suffered greatly, but courageously, staunch in faith.

These martyrs are among Africa's gifts to the Church, and in the tradition of the early African martyrs. They are now "added to the annals of that Africa of earlier times," as Pope Paul VI noted in his homily at the Mass of Canonization on October 18, 1964.

Pope Paul VI also said on that occasion: "These African martyrs herald the dawn of a new age. . . Africa has been washed by the blood of these latest martyrs, the first of this new age. . . Africa is reborn and independent."

Hopefully their loyalty will inspire many others to live in the Christian faith. (Opening Prayer). Their blood is the seed for African Christians of the present and future. Yet they are not just for Africans. All of us can take inspiration and courage from them.

ST. BONIFACE, BISHOP, MARTYR

An Anglo-Saxon monk, Boniface was a missionary to neglected Christian communities and to heathens. He labored in what is now The Netherlands, the Rhineland and Bavaria in present day West Germany, and in the neighboring areas of France. His papal commission was to Germany, and he is today honored as the apostle of Germany.

Boniface was entrusted with broad authority for evangelizing and organizing the Church in the areas in which he and his monks worked. He established the foundations of a strong faith by preaching and by establishing monasteries which greatly aided in the structuring of the German Church. At the same time he was influential in reforming the Frankish Church after the death of Charles Martel.

His activities were marked by a great zeal in preaching and by a sensitivity to the needs of his people. In a letter which we read on this, his feastday, he states: "Let us stand fast in what is right. . . Let us wait upon God's strengthening aid. . . Let us trust in Him. . . Let us preach the whole of God's plan to the powerful and to the humble, to rich and to poor. . . as far as God gives us the strength." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Like many early missionaries to heathen tribes, Boniface's life and efforts were rewarded with the martyr's crown at the hands of marauding pagans.

Through his intercession today we ask that we remain "loyal to our faith" and for the "courage to profess it in our lives." (Opening Prayer).

ST. NORBERT, MARTYR

St. Norbert, priest, founder of the Order of Premonstratensians, Archbishop of Magdeburg, is proposed to us as an "outstanding minister" of the Church, "renowed for his preaching and pastoral zeal." (Cf. Opening Prayer of the Mass).

The era in which he lived, the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, was a time of quarrels between the pope and emperor. Norbert's background was one of wealth, luxury and political influence. His outlook and behavior were rather worldly, but he experienced a dramatic conversion, and reformed his life. He sought ordination to the priesthood at age 35, and not content to reform his own life, he zealously preached spiritual renewal.

Norbert is an example to us, and by his life he showed that genuine reformation and change of heart must begin with oneself, if one is going to preach to others. His preaching brought him persecution and rejection, but he persevered and won over many of those who at first opposed him, both secular and religious.

Very quickly his exemplary zeal attracted others to the gospel values of poverty and simplicity of life, to a spirit of penance. And in political matters he became an agent of peace.

These are the gospel values we learn from St. Norbert. We can appreciate all of them, and zealously preach them in word and deed, in imitation of St. Norbert.

ST. EPHRAEM, DEACON, DOCTOR

St. Ephraem (306-373), a deacon, is the greatest Christian poet of the early Church. He lived through the last of the persecutions and the first years of peace for the Church, and during the time of the first great theological controversies.

His poetic ability was devoted to expressing Christian truth and doctrine in hymns and songs in the Syriac language. His hymns combine scriptural teaching, doctrinal truth and theological argumentation as well as spiritual theology. His poetry is intensely personal and very spiritual. The Opening Prayer of the Mass for his feast acknowledges Ephraem's ability to sing the praise of God's mysteries.

At times, his writings were directed to combatting the heresies of Arianism and Gnosticism. He is also revered for his devotion to Mary. Ephraem is so respected that he has been given the title of "doctor of the Church." In his ministry as deacon he was a friend of the poor among whom he worked humbly and with gentleness, seeking only the honor of God. The following text from his *Testament* is a tribute to his holiness:

"Lay me not with sweet spices,
For this honor avails me not,
Nor yet use incense and perfumes,
For the honor befits me not.
Burn ye the incense in the holy place;
As for me, escort me only with your prayers,
Give ye your incense to God,
And over me send up hymns.
Instead of perfumes and spices,
Be mindful of me in your intercessions."

From Ephraem's preaching we can learn much as we read from a sermon in today's Second Reading in the *Liturgy of the Hours*: "Lord, shed upon our darkened souls the brilliant light of your wisdom so that we may be enlightened and serve you with renewed purity. . . Grant that we may come to know the risen life

and that nothing may distract us from the delights you offer. . .In your sacrament we daily embrace you and receive you into our bodies; make us worthy to experience the resurrection for which we hope. . .Teach us to find our joy in your favor. . .May your resurrection, Jesus, bring true greatness to our spiritual self and may your sacraments be the mirror wherein we may know that self. . .Savior, your divine plan for the world is a mirror for the spiritual world; teach us to walk in that world as spiritual men” and women.

ST. BARNABAS, APOSTLE

"Help us to proclaim the gospel by word and deed." (Opening Prayer). What we know about St. Barnabas we learn in the Acts of the Apostles. He was a Cypriot, and was among the first of the faithful at Jerusalem. A respected preacher, he was a companion to St. Paul on his first missionary journey, and was present at the Council of Jerusalem, where with Paul he successfully presented the case of the gentile Christians. Later he returned to Cyprus and spread the gospel there.

In Acts 11:23, we read that "he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith." He was called "Son of encouragement." (Acts 4:36).

We hardly need to know more about him. He was evidently a revered missionary and respected preacher in the early Christian community, so much so that the title of apostle is given to him. Barnabas was among the first who recognized the work of God in the preaching to the pagan nations.

In word and deed, in preaching and in action Barnabas was untiring in his zeal. We pray today that we, too, by the gift and grace of the Holy Eucharist there be kindled "in us the flame of love by which St. Barnabas brought the light of the gospel to the nations."

Today we are reminded that all of us are also called to be apostles and to preach the gospel by word and deed.

ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA, PRIEST, DOCTOR

A learned and gentle man, St. Anthony of Padua became a Franciscan shortly after being ordained a priest at the age of 24. The Opening Prayer of the Mass calls him "an outstanding preacher and ready helper of the poor."

His first preaching was as a missionary to the Moors in Morocco, but illness caused his return to Italy. There his preaching ability became recognized and he used it to instruct and inspire many to spiritual renewal. He was eloquent, persuasive and gentle. He also helped bring about many social reforms that benefitted the poor and the oppressed.

In the Second Reading in the Liturgy of the Hours for his feastday we read from a sermon of St. Anthony: "Let your words teach and your actions speak." We know St. Anthony lived this dictum. He is so recognized for his brilliant preaching and his kind, gentle manner in dealing with problems, and the needy people of his time. He was equally adept at correcting errors of faith and at bringing about needed social reforms. His approach was always very spiritual and very kind. "It is useless for man to flaunt his knowledge of the law, if he undermines its teaching by his actions."

St. Anthony is so relevant to our day, and is rightly recognized as a Doctor of the Church, a great teacher of the Church. He accomplished much for God and us during the 36 years of life, and the 9 years of priesthood.

We pray through his intercession today for strengthening of faith and for zeal in living our Christian vocations. We pray, too, for unity and renewal of the Church for which he untiringly preached and worked.

ST. ROMUALD, ABBOT

The details of the life of St. Romuald (950-1027) tell us that from the time he first went to a monastery at the age of 20, he sought more and more an austere life of prayer and self-denial. This led him to live the life of a hermit while at the same time desiring to preach the gospel and suffer martyrdom. Illness forced him to abandon preaching in Hungary, and he returned to monastic life.

Not content to remain inactive, he established several monasteries for which he modified the Benedictine Rule to allow for a more contemplative and austere life. He is revered as the founder of the Camaldolese Order.

There is much to admire and imitate in the life of St. Romuald, which we can adapt to the circumstances of our lives. There is his perseverance in and dedication to prayer even in times of dryness, as well as his practice of virtue and self-discipline. Above all we can imitate his absolute trust in the providence of God, and his devotion to the will of God.

Through his intercession we pray today that God will renew the life of solitude and prayer in the Church as He did through St. Romuald in his day. We also pray that our self-denial will bring us the joy of heaven. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. ALOYSIUS GONZAGA, RELIGIOUS

“Remarkable innocence with a spirit of penance,” — this is what the Opening Prayer of Mass tells us of the life of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. From his early years he was pious and already as a young teenager he was interested in the revival of a true religious faith and practice.

His opportunities for a military or political career were many. But Aloysius chose religious life, and at age 18 he entered the Society of Jesus. The practice, then as now, was to combine the years of study with some practical ministry and experience. He was interested in instructing young people, and was called upon to care for the sick during the time of plague in Rome. Already frail, he became more ill, and died at the age of 23. Canonized in 1726, he was declared protector of young students and later patron of Catholic youth.

The overly pious images and statues of St. Aloysius do not do him justice, because they do not convey the strength of character of this young Jesuit. He was a mature, intelligent and remarkably decisive young man, who was strong in his religious vocation.

We invoke his intercession today and pray to imitate his prayerful faith and spirit of self-discipline and penance. He is a model not only for youth, but for all who sincerely strive to live in the spirit of the gospel. Like him they, “shall climb the mountain of the Lord and stand in his holy place. The innocent man, the pure of heart.” (Entrance Antiphon).

ST. PAULINUS OF NOLA, BISHOP

St. Paulinus of Nola (354?-431), a contemporary of Sts. Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome, was a respected lawyer and public official in Gaul and Italy. He retired from public office at an early age to the estate of his Spanish wife, Theresia, in order to study music and poetry, and to enjoy leisure time.

Shortly after his retirement, at age 35, he was baptized. Together with his wife who shared his ideals, he gave much of his wealth and possessions to the poor and needy for whom he already had shown great concern during his public life.

Ordained a priest with the consent of his wife, he turned to a life of solitude and prayer in a monastic setting. His wife Thersia had similar interests, but died after just a few years.

Paulinus was chosen to be bishop of Nola and he guided the Church there for approximately 21 years, "renowned for his love of poverty and concern for his people." (Opening Prayer). His ministry in Nola took place during the difficult time of the Visigoth invasions, when much in northern Italy was destroyed. Paulinus was a pillar of strength for his people.

We can learn from St. Paulinus the meaning of responsible commitment to a practical faith. He exemplifies for us also the virtue of fidelity.

ST. JOHN FISHER, BISHOP, MARTYR & ST. THOMAS MORE, MARTYR

"Give us courage to proclaim our faith by the witness of our lives." (Entrance Antiphon).

St. John Fisher (1469-1535), Bishop of Rochester, and St. Thomas More (1477-1535), layman and chancellor of the realm, gave their lives courageously to proclaim their faith.

St. John Fisher was a learned and brilliant preacher and apologist; St. Thomas More was an outstanding scholar, lawyer and public figure; twice married and the father of four children. Both were martyred for resisting Henry VIII in the case of his usurpation of the Church's spiritual power in England. Both refused to sanction the divorce and remarriage of the King.

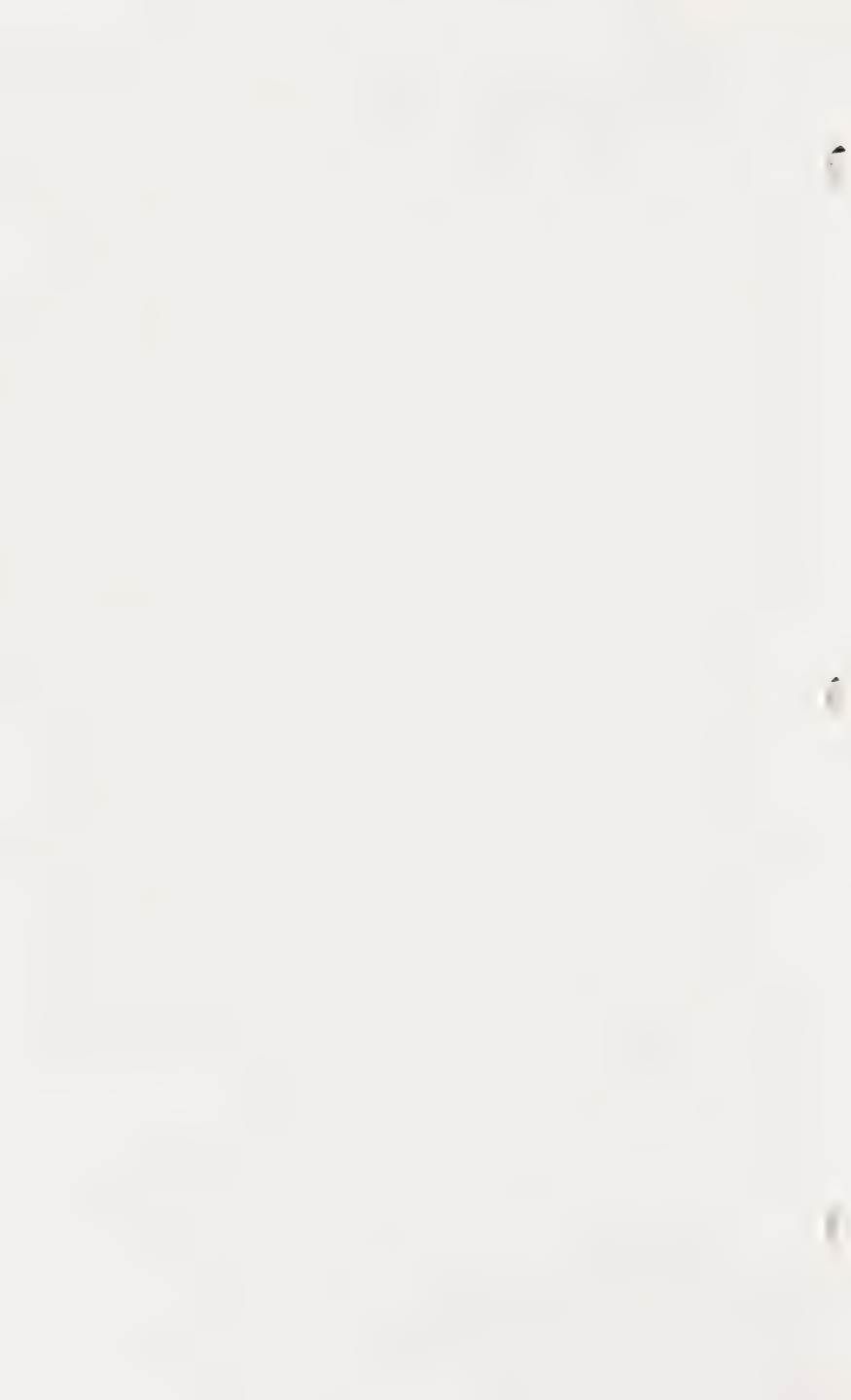
For both, their convictions and consciences prevailed over convenience. Both suffered with courage bolstered by faith.

Of St. Thomas More, Cardinal John Wright said, he was "one of the brightest personalities of the Renaissance." Something similar could be said of St. John Fisher who was a model priest and bishop, unpretentious and modest, genuinely concerned for the poor and anxious for the reform of the Church.

What Cardinal Wright further said of St. Thomas More, can be said with little change of St. John Fisher as well, that he was "a devout humanistic spirit. . .bold yet humble, venturesome in vision yet steadfast in attachment to old truths." This, the Cardinal said, "is a primary need of the professions in our own changing times."

Bishop Leo A. Pursley wrote of these two saints: "These two men had what we desperately need in dealing with the encroachment of civil powers upon the realm of religious faith and moral principle — conscience that cannot be confused, a conviction that cannot be compromised, a courage that cannot be conquered even by the fear of death."

St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More are both saints for all seasons; their kind of faith and courage are needed in all seasons.



THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

"There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came to bear witness to the light, to prepare an upright people for the Lord." (John 1:6-7; Luke 1:17 — Entrance Antiphon).

John the Baptist was a sign of expectation and promise, the last in the line of prophets sent "to prepare a perfect people for Christ the Lord." (Opening Prayer). Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller calls him "the fierce prophet of truth and justice. So great was John the Baptist that the entire prophetic ministry of the Hebrew Scriptures was summed up in him."

John preached that self-purification was necessary before one could embrace the Lord. Preparation for the coming of the Messiah must include prayer and penance. His message was not original, but was in the long tradition of the prophets of the Covenant. Since Jesus, the Messiah, was already in the midst of the people, John was telling them to reflect and look into their lives so that they would be able to recognize him.

John's questions and message are as relevant today as they were to his audience. They were people with doubts, who were confused and wondering. They were people who were seeking, hoping and believing, like ourselves. John asked them to believe more strongly, and to seek to improve their spiritual lives. He cried out with a force that had a ring of authority to it, like the prophets of old. "I am the voice of one crying in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" (John 1:23, & Isaiah 40:3).

John was telling the people of Israel, as well as us, to put our interior selves in order so that we might be ready for the coming of God. Today we can understand his message as a plea to make ourselves more worthy of God in our lives.

"The voice of John the Baptist challenges us to repentance and points the way to Christ the Lord." (alternate Opening Prayer). Conversion opens the way to appreciating and enhancing the Spirit of God in us; it opens the way to a deeper relationship with God.

All of us can intensify our spiritual efforts, and all of us have untapped spiritual resources, maybe unanswered spiritual graces. Such openness and effort, such intense spiritual desire on our part, will lead to profound personal and spiritual changes, which will then affect our life.

Today let us pray: "Open our ears to his (John's) message, and free our hearts to turn from our sins and receive the life of the gospel" (alternate Opening Prayer). We can then join our voices to the voice of John the Baptist and announce to our world that Jesus is our salvation and our peace.

ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, BISHOP, DOCTOR

A very controversial figure at a very controversial time in the history of Catholic doctrine is our saint for this day, St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444). He was a very capable, intelligent and forceful bishop at a time of theological crisis. He is remembered primarily today as the defender of the divine motherhood of the Virgin Mary, as noted in our Opening Prayer: "Bishop Cyril courageously taught that Mary was the Mother of God. . ." He championed that doctrine at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.

The theological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries occasioned a lot of animosity among the disagreeing theologians and bishops. Possibly, some of this could have been avoided with sensitivity on both sides of issues. Certainly, had there been more charity from all the participants and principal characters involved, this would have been the case.

Cyril didn't wear his piety on his sleeve. He was very adamant, very abrasive, if his contemporaries are believed, domineering, but very orthodox. He was an outstanding defender of Catholic truth, and revered today as a Doctor or teacher of the Church.

Despite his human frailties he remains one of the greatest figures of early Christian literature. Johannes Quasten, the outstanding scholar of patristic times, says that his writings reveal "a depth of thought and richness of ideas, a precision and clarity of argument."

May St. Cyril intercede for us so that we believe courageously and profess that belief in living witness to Jesus the incarnate Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary.



ST. IRENAEUS, BISHOP, MARTYR

Unity and peace in the Church were the goals of St. Irenaeus, (130-202). He was a second century apologist and theologian — tireless fighter against false ideas. He was priest and bishop of Lyons, France and a martyr for the faith.

Irenaeus is an important witness to apostolic succession in that he knew the greatest churches founded by the apostles and compiled a list of the bishops of those sees, located in Asia minor and in Rome. Born and educated in Smyrna (present day Turkey), he is an important link with the age of the apostles through St. Polycarp, who was a disciple of St. John.

In addition to his anti-heretical writings and his simple, clear explanations of the doctrines of the Church, he is an invaluable witness to the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, the See of Peter. He insists that one must defer to it as the center of doctrinal unity, and sees it as a great symbol of this unity.

We value Irenaeus for his testimony to the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, and he is an important link in the history of Eucharistic theology. He clearly teaches that the Mass is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ represented by the sacramental signs of bread and wine. His writings touch all major areas of theology: Christology, Mariology, the theology of the Church, and the doctrine of life after death.

Today in prayer we ask that Irenaeus's intercession will help "renew us in faith that we may always be intent on fostering unity and peace." (Opening Prayer).

STS. PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES

"This day has been made holy by the passion of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul." These are words of St. Augustine in a sermon for this feast (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*). "Through them the Church first received the faith." (Opening Prayer).

Fr. Carroll Stuhmüller wrote that Peter is "the line of continuity from Jesus to the world at large," and "Paul, for his part, was the line of enrichment." (*Biblical Meditations for Ordinary Time, Weeks 10-22*, p. 405).

In the gospels, St. Peter stands out as the apostle who most frequently took the initiative in the presence of Jesus. Sometimes it was embarrassing to himself, but Peter always remained undaunted. To put it more bluntly, Peter sometimes put his foot in his mouth, or made fool of himself. In a lesser man these occasions might have destroyed the person, but Peter had one quality that saved him in difficult situations. He had enthusiasm, and beneath all the fuss and bluster there was a humble man.

Peter took a prominent part at the last supper. Prior to that he was the acknowledged spokesman for the apostles. Jesus singled him out for special attention on many occasions both before and after his death and resurrection.

The *Acts of the Apostles* portrays Peter as a leader of the early Church, and history confirms that. He undertook enormous hardships and fearlessly faced persecution. Peter was a man of action, sometimes impetuous, but always an ardent lover of Christ.

St. Paul, who was well versed in rabbinical learning, at first zealously persecuted the Church. However, on his way to Damascus to arrest some prominent Christians there, he was literally knocked off his high horse, and made to understand Christ in that instant. From then on, his life's direction and purpose changed radically.

The next three years of his life were spent in solitude, and then

he plunged into a life of missionary activity and preaching that would tax the endurance of the heartiest missionaries of today. Who is not impressed by the record of Paul's journeys as recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles*?

Paul was the most powerful apostolic personality. His life and example, and his letters have been the inspiration for the preaching Church since.

Today in our liturgy and prayer we honor these two saints, so different in personality and background, yet so alike in their intense love of Christ. There is something in both of them for us to admire and to imitate in addition to their great love of Christ. Both are examples of humility that comes from the knowledge of truth. Both are examples of enthusiasm in service, of optimism in outlook. Both took rightful pride in their accomplishments, recognizing that these accomplishments were due to the grace of Christ.

To return to St. Augustine, "These martyrs realized what they taught, they pursued justice, they confessed truth, they died for it."

It isn't necessary to spell out how we can imitate them. It is obvious.

THE FIRST MARTYRS OF THE CHURCH OF ROME

The *Roman Martyrology* today commemorates the first martyrs of the Church of Rome. It calls them "the first fruits with which Rome, so fruitful in that seed, had peopled heaven." Throughout the history there have been so many others, from the first martyrs in Rome to those of the present day, often, they are known only to God.

We ought to be impressed and inspired by the faith and courage of all the martyrs. St. Clement I, Pope, and third successor of St. Peter, wrote a letter to the Corinthians at the beginning of the second century. What he said is true of these first martyrs and all martyrs since: "It was through jealousy and envy that the greatest and most upright pillars of the Church were persecuted and struggled unto death." (2nd Reading, Office of readings). Addressing those still in danger of persecution, Clement admonished: "Let us fix our gaze on the blood of Christ, realizing how precious it is to his Father, since it was shed for our salvation and brought the grace of repentance to all the world." (ibid).

The martyrs speak to us of the power and presence of Jesus in the Church. We must pray that in the midst of our daily struggles in the practice of our faith that "we find strength from their courage and rejoice in their triumph." (Opening Prayer).

ST. THOMAS, APOSTLE

"My Lord and my God." Who does not recognize this touching cry of faith of the apostle Thomas? His doubts gave way to the loving gesture of Jesus inviting him to touch his wounds as proof of his living presence.

We know nothing certain about the subsequent ministry of St. Thomas. Tradition tells us that he preached in Parthia and as far east as India, and that he was martyred near present day Madras. Pope Paul VI declared him Patron of India in 1972.

In a homily by Pope St. Gregory the Great we read today that Thomas' absence and doubt were "not by chance but in God's providence. In a marvellous way God's mercy arranged that the disbelieving disciple, in touching the wounds of his Master's body, should heal our wounds of disbelief." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

There are many dimensions to faith. It can and does affect our lives in many ways. It give us a sense of unity; it leads to hope in a better and more perfect life, and to charity which is motivated by it. Faith is a dynamic gift and grace.

Doubts we may have as St. Thomas did, but these only remind us that we have not exhausted the mystery of God. Pope St. Gregory the Great said: "The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of the other disciples. As he touches Christ and is won over to belief, every doubt is cast aside and our faith is strengthened." (2nd Reading).

On this feast of the apostle Thomas we pray that "we may have eternal life by believing in Jesus." (Opening Prayer).

ST. ELIZABETH OF PORTUGAL

Married at age 12 to King Denis of Portugal, St. Elizabeth of Portugal (1271-1336), was a mother of two children; she was a pious, and a very gracious and charitable lady. She showed great concern for the poor, abandoned children and wayward girls. Her charity in these concerns was outstanding.

Elizabeth's marriage was a difficult one, as her husband was flagrantly unfaithful, jealous and quarrelsome. Throughout her life, as queen, and later as a widow and a third order Franciscan tertiary, she promoted peace among quarrelling factions in her own family. The opening prayer of the Mass notes this — she had “the gift of reconciling enemies.” Most notably she brought about a reconciliation between her husband and son.

Elizabeth was a model wife and mother, and she is a model and example for women who find themselves in difficult marriages today. She has been called “peacemaker.” In a sermon attributed to St. Peter Chrysologus which we read today we are told that Christian virtues grow in one “who enjoys the unchangeable possession of Christian peace.” The sermon continues: “Peace among brethren is the will of God. . .Peace lends strength to our prayer. . .Peace is the mother of love, the bond of concord and the manifest sign of a pure soul.” The life and example of St. Elizabeth of Portugal bears out the truth of these words.

Elizabeth heeded the advice of St. Peter Chrysologus: “We must keep peace before all other virtues, since God is always at peace. Love peace, and all the world will be tranquil and quiet.” (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

We ask in prayer today: “Father of peace and love. . .give us the courage to work for peace. . .that we may be called the [children] of God.” (Opening Prayer).



ST. ANTHONY MARIA ZACCARIA, PRIEST

Austere asceticism is one way to convince the Church that there is need for reformation and renewal of spirit. St. Anthony Maria Zaccaria (1502-1539) was a humble priest, very demanding of himself in matters ascetical. He was zealous in preaching about the need for reform in the life of the Church, and moral renewal among clergy and laity in the years following the Protestant Reformation.

He was the founder of two religious communities, one for men and one for women. He endeavored to instill in his followers the enthusiasm of St. Paul the Apostle. To them he wrote: "We have chosen such a great apostle as our guide. . . We should try to put his teaching and example into practice in our lives. Such a leader should not be served by faint-hearted troops." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

In the opening prayer of Mass on this day we pray that, like St. Anthony Maria Zaccaria, we will be able "to grasp the spirit of St. Paul, the sublime wisdom of Jesus Christ," that motivated our saint. We can, perhaps, resolve to enthusiastically live our Christian vocation and be joyful witnesses to Jesus.

ST. MARIA GORETTI, VIRGIN, MARTYR

"Not all of us are expected to die a martyr's death, but we are all called to the pursuit of Christian virtue." Pope Pius XII spoke these words at the canonization of Maria Goretti (1890-1902) on June 24, 1950.

In 1947 and again in 1950 at the beatification and canonization of Maria Goretti the Catholic world was awed and edified when her life story became widely known. When she was not yet twelve years old, she died defending her purity when attacked by a teen-age neighbor. She was brutally murdered and in her last moments of life she forgave her attacker. He later was converted in prison and was present at her canonization — a grace he attributes to Maria's prayers.

Maria was born to a poor family, had a difficult childhood, spent long hours daily assisting her mother with household chores. She was a pious and devout child, and had an outstanding appreciation and understanding of spiritual values for one so young.

In his sermon at the canonization Pope Pius XII said: "With splendid courage she surrendered herself to God and his grace." He concluded his sermon: "Through her prayers to the Redeemer may all of us, each in his own way, joyfully try to follow the inspiring example of Maria Goretti who now enjoys eternal happiness in heaven."

"Let her prayers keep us faithful to your teaching," is our prayer to God our Father this day. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. BENEDICT, ABBOT

The Father of Western Monasticism and patron of Europe, St. Benedict of Nursia (480-547), is the saint we honor today in our liturgy and prayer. Western monasticism is a monument to St. Benedict, and it is also one of the foundations of Western Civilization. It was monasticism that preserved and promoted classical learning for our times.

Initially, St. Benedict was interested in a life of solitude, and lived as a hermit for three years. Soon he found that others looked to him for guidance and he convinced them of the value of uniting the spiritual life with the practicality of community living. This eventually resulted in the establishment of monasteries which gave a great stability to the lives of hermits and monks who banded together to form such communities.

Benedict's experience and ideal are embodied in his *Regula* or Rules which have been founding principles of religious life in the West ever since. Benedict's *Rule* prescribes "common sense, a life of moderate asceticism, prayer, study, work and community life under one superior. It stressed obedience, stability, zeal, and had the Divine Office as the center of Monastic life; it was to affect spiritual and monastic life in the West for centuries to come." So wrote John J. Delaney in *Dictionary of Saints*, (1980, p. 96).

The principles of the *Rule* are not just for monks. It contains much practical direction for all Christians. Today in the Office of Readings we read from Benedict's *Rule*:

"Whenever you begin any good work you should first of all make a most pressing appeal to Christ our Lord to bring it to perfection. . . We must always serve him with the good things he has given us. . . Our eyes should be open to the God-given light, and we should listen in wonderment to the message of the Divine Voice as it daily cries out."

Elsewhere in the *Rule* there is more spiritual counsel:

"Anticipate each other with respect. . . Bear with one another's physical and spiritual offenses patiently. . . Let no

one seek something for himself, but rather whatever is of advantage for another. . . Render worship to God in love. . .

We recognize St. Benedict today as an outstanding guide and teacher. His wisdom is passed on to us today through the monastic traditions and institutions that bear his name and preserve his memory.

At this mass our first reading from the *Book of Proverbs* (2:1-9 — reading suggested in *Lectionary for Mass, #597*) allows us to acknowledge St. Benedict's search for wisdom, and the gifts that flow from it — knowledge, intelligence, understanding, fear of the Lord, rectitude and justice, honesty and every good path.

St. Benedict teaches us that the Lord is the source of wisdom, the giver of knowledge and discernment, and the guardian of justice for those who seek to follow His ways.

ST. HENRY

After he was "anointed king, he was not satisfied with the anxieties of his realm; so in order to attain the crown of immortality, he determined to campaign for the King of all, for to serve him is to rule." These words are found in an ancient life of St. Henry (973-1024).

Duke of Bavaria and later Holy Roman Emperor, Henry was a man of unusual strength of character, a capable military leader and an intelligent statesman. He was also pious and energetic in his work for Church reform, especially in liturgical worship, and in promoting missionary activity. His interest in the Church was shared by his wife, Saint Kunegunda (d. 1033), who became a Benedictine nun after Henry's death in 1024.

Henry's piety and asceticism are indicated in a letter from which we read today in the Office of Readings: "We are taught and advised to abandon temporal riches, to lay aside earthly goods, and to strive to reach the eternal and everlasting dwelling-places in heaven. For present glory is fleeting and meaningless, while it is possessed, unless in it we can glimpse something of heaven's eternity."

Pope John XXIII told us in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* that we all have a duty to take an "active part in public life and to contribute toward the attainment of the common good of the entire human family." (n. 146). St. Henry abided by this teaching in his life and work; he was a responsible political figure. Pope John XXIII continued: "Every believer in this world of ours must be a spark of light, a center of love, a vivifying leaven amidst his fellow men. And he will be this all the more perfectly, the more closely he lives in communion with God in the intimacy of his own soul." (no. 164).

BL. KATERI TEKAKWITHA, VIRGIN

Kateri Tekakwitha (c1656-1680), the “Lily of the Mohawks,” lived a life of great holiness and austerity. We venerate her for her holiness of life and concern for others.

Details of her life are sketchy. John Delaney in his *Dictionary of Saints* (p. 541f) tells us that she was born in Auriesville, N.Y., in 1656. Her mother was a Christian Algonquin who had been captured by Iroquois and married to a Mohawk chief. Kateri was orphaned at an early age, and disfigured by small-pox. When she was 20 years old she became a Catholic, and was then subjected to great abuse and ostracism by family and friends. This led her to flee to a Christian village near Montreal, Canada, in 1677.

Shortly before her death she vowed virginity and dedicated herself to Christ. She died at age 24. Pope John Paul II beatified her in 1980.

Today we pray through her intercession, and acknowledge her “as an example of innocence of life.” (Opening Prayer).

ST. CAMILLUS DE LELLIS, PRIEST

After a rather inauspicious youth — he was an unloved, neglected child, addicted to gambling, in ill health and quarrelsome — Camillus (1550-1614) was moved to change his life and attitude after hearing a sermon at the Capuchin friary at Manfredonia, Italy.

He subsequently made efforts to join the Capuchins, but was twice refused because of ill health. He then decided to devote himself to the care of the sick. On the advice of St. Philip Neri he became a priest at age 34, and shortly thereafter founded a religious order whose primary purpose is to care for the sick.

In an account of his life by a companion we learn that Camillus was a model of charity; “he was on fire with this holy virtue. . .especially toward the sick. . .He would have loved to take upon himself all their illness, their every affliction, could he but ease their pain. . .In the sick he saw the person of Christ. . .In their presence he talked of nothing more often or with great feeling than of holy charity. He would have liked to plant this virtue in every human heart. . .” (Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

That short excerpt tells us all we need know about St. Camillus, and it is a preaching that we can all take to heart.

ST. BONAVENTURE, BISHOP, DOCTOR

“May we always benefit from his wisdom and follow his example of love.” (Opening Prayer).

St. Bonaventure (1128-1274), Franciscan, Superior General of his Order, later Cardinal-bishop of Albano, is one of the great philosophers and theologians of the thirteenth century. His was a time of great theological endeavor and accomplishment. A contemporary of St. Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure was both teacher and administrator, preacher and mystic, held in great esteem by all, especially by Religious and by high ecclesiastical authority.

His writings are extensive — biblical commentaries, ascetical and mystical writings, sermons, a biography of St. Francis of Assisi. He is recognized for his outstanding contributions to theology both in his time and still today, and is honored with the title Doctor of the Church.

A chronicler wrote of him: Bonaventure was “a man of eminent learning and eloquence and of outstanding holiness; he was known for his kindness, approachableness, gentleness and compassion. . .”

That tells us much about this saint, and we can get a further appreciation of his holiness and spiritual character from a reading which is part of our prayer today. In the *Liturgy of the Hours* we read from one of his mystical writings, *The Journey of the Mind of God*: “Christ is both the way and the door. Christ is the staircase and the vehicle, like the throne of mercy over the Ark of the Covenant, and the mystery hidden from the ages. A man should turn his full attention to this throne of mercy, and should gaze at him hanging on the cross, full of faith, hope and charity, devoted, full of wonder and joy, marked by gratitude, and open to praise and jubilation.”

We are the beneficiaries of the wisdom of St. Bonaventure, and he is a gentle teacher of God’s love. May we learn from him and follow his example.

ST. LAWRENCE OF BRINDISI, PRIEST, DOCTOR

“Lord, for the glory of your name and the salvation of souls you gave Lawrence of Brindisi courage and right judgement. . .”
(Opening Prayer).

After reading about St. Lawrence of Brindisi (1559-1619) in various dictionaries of saints and commentaries in various sources, I am impressed by the talent and energy of this saint. Well educated in philosophy and theology at the University of Padua, one of the great medieval schools, he was ordained a priest at age 23. His brilliant use of sacred scripture in preaching was soon recognized. He was an accomplished linguist, fluent in the biblical languages and the major languages of continental Europe.

27 Recognized as well in addition to his theological brilliance was his “human compassion and administrative skill,” which served him well as Minister General of his Order, and on the many peace-keeping missions he undertook for the pope and several monarchs of his day. “Lawrence had a balance in his life that was able to blend self-discipline with a keen appreciation for the needs of those whom he was called to serve.” This was true of his ministry in the Church, in his religious order and as arbiter in many political disputes and threatening situations.

His first love and his greatest talent was his preaching in which he used the Scriptures with great skill. In one of his sermons he said:

“For the word of God is a light to the mind and a fire to the will. It enables man to know God and to love him. And for the interior man who lives by the Spirit of God through grace, it is bread and water. . . For the soul is a spiritual treasure of merits yielding an abundance of gold and precious stones. Against the hardness of heart that persists in wrongdoing, it acts as a hammer. Against the world, the flesh and the devil it serves as a sword that destroys all sin.”

(2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

We pray today through the intercession of St. Lawrence of Brindisi, Doctor of the Church, “to know what we should do and. . .the courage to do it.” (Opening Prayer).

ST. MARY MAGDALENE

To St. Mary Magdalene was given the privilege of being the first to whom the risen Jesus appeared. The opening prayer of the Mass states that Jesus "first entrusted to Mary Magdalene the joyful news of his resurrection," and the gospels tell us she was sent to the disciples to make this reality known.

Who is this Mary of Magdala? Apparently not the woman, the unknown sinner who anointed the feet of Jesus (Cf. Luke 7:36); not the sister of Martha, for she had been wrongfully identified with both.

From the Gospels we do conclude that she was the one from whom Jesus had cast out seven devils (Cf. Mk. 16:9 & Lk. 8:2); that she is one of the women who ministered to the needs of Jesus (Lk. 8:2), was a witness of the crucifixion (Mt. 27:56; Mk. 15:40; Jn. 19:25), was present at the burial of Jesus (Mt. 27:61; Mk. 15:47), and was at the empty tomb (Cf. Mt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:1-12). The gospel of John specifically says she was the first to whom the risen Jesus appeared. (Cf. Jn. 20:11-18).

Among the women who followed Jesus during his public ministry, Mary Magdalene is always mentioned first, and it would seem that she was the leader of this group who used their means to provide for Jesus and his apostles. From the attention that she is given by the evangelists we are certain that she was a devoted follower, and because she received the privilege of being the first to experience the Resurrection, we understand that she was obviously greatly loved by Jesus.

In a homily that we read on this her feast day, St. Gregory the Great suggests:

"We should reflect on Mary's attitude and the great love she felt for Christ; for though the disciples had left the tomb, she remained. She was still seeking the one she had not found, and while she sought she wept; burning with the fire of love, she longed for him who she thought had been

taken away. And so it happened that the woman who stayed behind to seek Christ was the only one to see him. For perseverance is essential to any good deed, as the voice of truth tells us: *Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved.* (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Today we pray that we may “proclaim Christ as our living Lord and one day see Him in glory,” (Opening Prayer), and that we be filled “with the same faithful love that kept Mary Magdalene close to Christ.” (Prayer after Communion).

ST. BRIDGET, RELIGIOUS

Bridget was born to wealthy parents in Upland, Sweden in 1303. From her early years, already at age 7, Bridget or Birgitta was favored with visions and revelations. Married at age 14, and mother of eight children, one of whom was St. Catherine of Sweden, she spent many years at court. After the death of her husband in 1344 she lived the next four years in a Cistercian monastery in great austerity and prayer.

Her revelations continued and she often rebuked kings and royalty for their lax and immoral behavior. She also urged the popes to return to Rome from Avignon. She introduced reform to monasteries, and founded the Order of the Most Holy Trinity (the Brigittine Nuns).

Bridget's holiness and penitential life impressed her contemporaries, and she was known, too, for her concern for the poor.

In addition to her unique gifts and contributions to the life and growth of the Church, she truly identified with the poor, the sick and the needy. In this she continued the biblical tradition of the prophets of Israel from very ancient times through Jesus himself.

In this sense, St. Bridget was not only a noble lady, but a prophet as well. She spoke out for the truth and loved the poor and oppressed; she was a remarkable and extraordinary, holy woman. She drew her strength from prayer and meditation on the suffering and death of Jesus. (Cf. Opening Prayer). Our text at the Office of Readings today is from prayers attributed to St. Bridget. A sample:

"Honor be to you, my Lord Jesus Christ. Fearing your passion and death, you poured forth from your innocent body like sweat, and still you accomplished our redemption as you desired and gave us the clearest proof of your love for all men."

One writer observed that Bridget's visions and revelations did not isolate her from that affairs of the world; they involved her in

many contemporary issues, both secular and ecclesiastical. "She saw no contradiction between mystical experience and secular activity, and her life is a testimony to the possibility of a holy life in the market place." (*Saint of the day*, ed. by Leonard Foley. v. 2, p. 21).

Cardinal John J. Wright wrote eloquently of her:

"She had a remarkable sense of what we would call nowadays *social responsibility*, especially to the poor. She would not allow her associates to retain much money or to live in great display, but each religious could have as many books for study as he or she desired. She was an intellectual of the first magnitude. . .

"In her practical efficiency she was an exemplar of masterful '*know-how*'; in her intellectual spirituality she was a model of mystical *know-why*. Our civilization has an abundance of *know-how* knowledge, but it does not have proportionate *know-why* wisdom. We *know how* to murder, for example, and to destroy life by abortion or by bombs; we do not always *know why* we must work for life, for peace, and for God. That is why we need so urgently to remember our saints, particularly saints like Saint Birgitta who knew how to combine *know-how* knowledge and *know-why* wisdom in the service of peace, and life, of man and God." (*The saints always belong to the present*, p. 154).

St. Bridget died in Rome in 1370; she was canonized 21 years later.

ST. JAMES, APOSTLE

James, the brother of John, was among the first called by Jesus to be closely associated with him throughout his public ministry. He was also singled out by Jesus, together with Peter and John, and was a privileged witness at the Transfiguration, at the raising of the daughter of Jairus to life, and during the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane.

There is an old tradition that he preached the gospel in Spain before returning to Jerusalem. Upon his return we know from the *Acts of the Apostles* that he was martyred by Herod Agrippa who had him beheaded. (Cf. Acts 12:1-2). This tradition is noted also in the prayer over the gifts at Mass today; we honor St. James, "the first apostle to share the cup of suffering and death."

The gospel incident which we just read tells that the mother of James and John petitioned for a place of honor for her sons in the kingdom of Jesus. Jesus treats the question seriously and provides a perspective that explains what it means to follow after him in terms of service. That service is one of availability to all in need, and of totality in that it may ask one's life.

St. John Chrysostom, in a sermon which we read today in the Office of Readings, explains the subsequent understanding of the apostles:

" 'Then the other ten became angry at the two brothers.' See how imperfect they all are: the two who tried to get ahead of the other ten, and the ten who were jealous of the two! But, as I said before, show them to me at a later date in their lives, and you will see that all these impulses and feelings have disappeared. Read how John, the very man who here asks for the first place, will always yield to Peter when it comes to preaching and performing miracles in the *Acts of the Apostles*. James, for his part, was not to live much longer; for from the beginning he was inspired by great fervor and, setting aside all purely human goals, rose

to such splendid heights that he straight-away suffered martyrdom."

The apostles learned the lesson that Jesus taught on this occasion: "Anyone among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest, and whoever wants to rank first among you must serve the needs of all." (Matthew 20:26-27).

We ask courage and strength through the intercession of St. James by whose martyrdom the work of the early Church was blessed. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

STS. JOACHIM AND ANN, PARENTS OF MARY

Early tradition and an apocryphal gospel (*The Proto-gospel of James*) provide the names of the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The apocryphal writings provide legendary information that attempts to fill in details that the canonical gospels do not give. The writings tell us little that is reliable, although they often are indispensable for understanding the piety of the early Christian communities.

The *Proto-gospel of James* tells of the marriage of Joachim and Ann who became desolate because they were childless. While fasting and praying they came to understand that they were to have a child. Ann promised to dedicate the child to God, and they named her Mary. At age 3 Mary was presented in the temple in fulfillment of the vow of Joachim and Ann.

The point of the legends is clearly the statement "that Mary was chosen by God in a special way and has a particular role in the history of salvation. Joachim and Ann are simply background figures." (Albert Schneider, *Communion with the saints*, p. 290).

Our focus, in honoring Sts. Joachim and Ann, is actually on the birth of Mary. "God of our Fathers, you gave Sts. Joachim and Ann the privilege of being the parents of Mary, the mother of your incarnate Son." (Opening Prayer).

In a sermon by St. John Damascene we read: "Joachim and Ann, how blessed a couple! For at your hands the Creator was offered a gift excelling all other gifts: a chaste mother, who alone was worthy of him. . . You will be known by the fruit you have borne. . . The conduct of your life pleased God and was worthy of your daughter. . . You achieved with God's help something which transcends nature in giving the world the Virgin Mother of God as your daughter. . . a daughter nobler than the angels, whose queen she now is. . ." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

We commemorate and celebrate today a moment, an event,

in salvation history, and ask that the prayers of Joachim and Ann help us to attain the salvation God promised to His people (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. MARTHA

"As Jesus entered a certain village a woman called Martha welcomed him into her house." (Luke 10:38; Entrance Antiphon). "Father, your Son honored St. Martha by coming to her home as a guest." (Opening Prayer).

St. John and St. Luke attest to the fact that Martha enjoyed the friendship and esteem of Jesus. According to St. Luke (10:36-42), who provides one of the possible gospel texts for today, Martha is apparently the head of the household. She is described as "busy with all the details of hospitality," (NAB 1970), or in a more recent translation, "burdened with much serving" (NAB revised N.T. 1986). This rendering of the Greek word "*diakonia*" may indicate that Martha was busy not with just the task of preparing for and cooking a meal, but with different kinds of service corresponding to the office of deacon(ess) in the church known to St. Luke. (An interesting thought for reflection).

In the other possible gospel text for today St. John (11:19-27) tells of Martha going out to meet Jesus who had heard of the death of Lazarus, her brother. Martha accepts Jesus' teaching concerning the resurrection, and acknowledged him as Lord, and confesses her faith: "You are the Messiah, the Son of God. . ."

We are reminded of so much on this saint's feastday: Mary's contemplative interest, her "better portion" seated at the feet of Jesus and listening to his words, Martha's anxiety and worry about many things, Jesus giving a delicate balance to the importance of contemplation against the need for temporal concern and service.

Martha is a model of hospitality and genuine concern, and activist for sure. She is one who knows the value of and the need for contemplation. Could we not see this as the reason why she complains about Mary not assisting her in her household service? Did she, perhaps, not long for Mary's part as the "better portion?"

The virtue of hospitality is praised throughout the New

Testament, and the gospel lists it as one of the works of charity by which we will be judged. "I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink. . ." (Cf. *Matthew 25:35ff*). And Jesus, with no home of his own, relied on the practice of hospitality and was often a guest.

St. Martha today is honored as a model of Christian life. Imitating her may we be free from "undue attachment to this passing life," (Prayer after Communion), and "may we serve Christ in our brothers and sisters and be welcomed. . .into heaven, our true home." (Opening Prayer).

ST. PETER CHRYSOLOGUS, BISHOP, DOCTOR

Though few details of his life are known one is instantly attracted to St. Peter Chrysologus (380-450). One cannot fail to be interested in a preacher who would say in a New Year's sermon: "The man who wants to play with the devil will not be able to rejoice with Christ."

About the year 425 Peter became the bishop of Ravenna, the western capital of the Empire. He is honored primarily as a homilist, a practical preacher, a master of the well-prepared, short homily. Peter would be a model for imitation and many would name him a saint for those reasons alone.

His character shines through his preaching. He was a sensitive man, very fervent and devout, with insight into the christian life and an understanding of grace. His sermons were full of moral applications, sound in doctrine, and historically significant. From them we learn much about the liturgical and christian life in Ravenna in the early fifth century. Pope Benedict XIII declared him "doctor of the Church" because of his sermons, and his preaching earned him the surname Chrysologus — "the golden-mouthed."

Zealous in his duties as a bishop, he was fiercely loyal to the Church and to the bishop of Rome. He appreciated learning and he saw the use of one's God-given talents as an obligation for all. Learning was next to virtue in importance.

Here are some examples of Peter's appealing style of preaching: "Peace rescues man from servitude. . . Peace among the brethren is the will of God, the joy of Christ, the completion of holiness, the rule of justice, the teacher of truth, the guardian of morals and a praiseworthy discipline in every regard." (Sermon 52). In a lenten sermon he said: "There are three things by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and mercy. . . they give life to each other." (Sermon 43).

In a sermon explaining the priesthood of the christian we read: "Each of us is called to be both a sacrifice to God and his priest. Do not forfeit what divine authority confers on you. Put on the garment of holiness, gird yourself with the belt of chastity. Let Christ be your helmet, let the cross on your forehead be your unfailing protection. Your breastplate should be the knowledge of God that he himself has given you. . . Let your heart be an altar. Then, with full confidence in God, present your body for sacrifice. God desires not death, but faith; God thirsts not for blood, but for self-surrender; God is appeased not by slaughter, but by the offering of your free will." (Sermon 108).

Finally, from a doctrinal sermon on the Incarnation of Christ which we read in today's Office of Readings: "Christ is born that by his birth he might restore our nature. He became a child, was fed, and grew that he might inaugurate the one perfect age to remain for ever as he created it. He supports man that man might no longer fall. And the creature he had formed of earth he now makes heavenly, and what he endowed with a human soul he now vivifies to become a heavenly spirit. In this way he fully raised man to God." (Sermon 148).

"Outstanding preacher of the incarnate word" is how we recognize this saint in the Opening Prayer of Mass today, and we ask St. Peter Chrysologus to "help us cherish the mystery of our salvation, and make its meaning clear in our love for others."

ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, PRIEST

The youngest of thirteen children, Ignatius was born of noble Basque parents in 1491. He pursued a military career; was wounded in battle, and while recuperating he began to read a life of Christ and lives of the saints, and was so impressed that he decided to devote himself to Christ. After a long period of prayer and fasting and penance, after long spiritual struggle, he began to write of his conversion experience in his great work the *Spiritual Exercises*. For the next eleven years he was a student at various European universities.

In 1534, 43 years old, he, together with six others, St. Francis Xavier among them, founded the Society of Jesus. Four years later it was formalized and made permanent with papal approval. For his society Ignatius placed great emphasis on the vow of obedience, and the members placed themselves unconditionally at the disposition of the Holy Father. The spirit of Ignatius and his followers is found in their motto, "for the greater glory of God."

St. Ignatius set three goals for the Church and as normative guiding principles for his society's activities: reform of the Church especially through education and frequent use of the sacraments, widespread missionary activity, and the fight against heresy. At the time of his death in 1556 the Society of Jesus was well established in these endeavors.

The desire to be in conformity to the will of God was almost an obsession with Ignatius. In his letters he would often write: "I beg God our Lord that he may deign in his generosity and goodness to grant us a suberabundance of grace, in order that we may fully experience his most holy will and carry it out entirely." He constantly taught that it is divine initiative that chooses or "elects" us, and that we must therefore be open to "elect" or choose God in return. The whole of the *Exercises* leads to making this choice or election of God.

The choice of the optional first reading for today's mass is

most fitting. The words are Paul's, but the spirit is that of St. Ignatius: "Imitate me as I imitate Christ. Whether you eat or drink — whatever you do — you should do all for the glory of God. . . I try to please all in any way I can be seeking, not my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved." (I Corinthians 11:1, 10:31, 33; Cf. *Lectionary*, #609).

A closing thought is found in the Responsory to the 2nd Reading in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, taken from the I Peter 4:11.

Whoever speaks should proclaim God's message; whoever ministers should serve by the power that God gives,
— so that in all of you God may be glorified through
Jesus Christ.

Before all else be constant in your love for one another.
— so that in all of you God may be glorified through
Jesus Christ.

ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI, BISHOP, DOCTOR

Several years ago a work on the moral theology of St. Alphonsus Liguori was published, authored by Redemptorist theologian Bernard Haring. It was titled: *The Law of Christ*. Our saint for today, St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787), was the outstanding moral teacher of the 18th century. The law of Christ for Alphonsus Liguori was the law of love. His moral theology was written to help pastors and confessors of his time who were called upon to give specific advice and make decisions for penitents.

St. Alphonsus always tried to present a moderate balance between law and liberty, and consequently he was unjustly accused of teaching a minimalistic approach to moral theology. In reality his was a practical pastoral approach.

Alphonsus would have been pleased by the II Vatican Council and its statement that the scientific exposition of moral theology "should more fully draw on the teaching of Holy Scripture, and should throw light upon the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world." (*Decree on Priestly Formation*, 16).

Educated to be a lawyer, he practiced law for eight years, and then at age 24 decided to become a priest. After ordination he undertook missionary preaching in the kingdom of Naples. There he founded the Redemptorists in 1732, and struggled through many difficulties to firmly establish the Congregation. At age 66 he was appointed bishop of a small diocese and initiated needed reforms. In his last years he suffered much spiritual distress and physical ailments, but eventually arrived at a time of peace. He died at age 91, was declared a saint half a century later in 1839, and doctor of the Church in 1871 by Pope Pius IX.

In addition to his work in moral theology his spiritual and

dogmatic writings are well known, especially *The Glories of Mary*. St. Alphonsus is a model for the daily practical living of the christian life. He experienced the problems, the pains, the doubts, the temptations, the misunderstandings and the failures that we all know from time to time. Through it all he persevered because of an abiding sense of the presence of the suffering Christ. St. Alphonsus was a trusting, kind and gentle saint.

From a sermon by St. Alphonsus we read today:

“All holiness and perfection of soul lies in our love for Jesus Christ our God, who is our redeemer and our supreme good. . . Since God knew that man is enticed by favors, he wished to bind him by means of his gifts. . . And all the gifts he bestowed on man were given to this end. He gave him a soul, made in his likeness. He endowed him with memory, intellect and will; he gave him a body equipped with the senses. It was for him that he created heaven and earth and such an abundance of things. He made all these things out of love for man, so that all creation might serve man, and man in turn might love God out of gratitude for so many gifts. . .

“He went so far as to bestow upon us the fullness of himself. The eternal Father went so far as to give us his only Son. When he saw that we were all dead through sin and deprived of grace, what did he do? He sent his beloved Son to make reparation for us and to call us back to a sinless life.” (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

“Father. . . give us the grace to follow St. Alphonsus in his loving concern for the salvation of all men” and women. (Opening Prayer).

ST. EUSEBIUS OF VERCELLI, BISHOP

The early fourth century brought to the fore many bishops who were champions of correct theological teaching about the divinity of Jesus Christ against the first major heresy attacking his divinity. One of these bishops was Eusebius, bishop of Vercelli, a small mountain city in northern Italy. He became bishop there in 345.

Like so many others he was persecuted and harrassed because of his orthodox stand and writings. Taken into the politics of the theological dispute, he traveled about much trying to make peace and effect compromise between feuding factions. His insistence that the emperor keep out of the theological dispute led to his exile and further grief. Hunger-strikers may have a patron in St. Eusebius — while in Palestine the Arians imprisoned him in a small house, but released him after a four day hunger-strike.

Eventually he was able to return to his diocese; there he continued to preach and promote monastic life. He died there peacefully in 371.

From a letter that he wrote to the people of his diocese while he was in exile we read:

"I know now that you are safe, as I was hoping. . .I rejoice in your faith, in the salvation that comes from faith, in your good works, which are not confined to your own surroundings but spread far and wide. . .I want not only to serve you in the body, good people that you are, but also to give my life for your well-being. . .

"I beg you to keep the faith with all vigilance, to preserve harmony, to be earnest in prayer, to remember me always, so that the Lord may grant freedom to his Church which is suffering throughout the world, and that I may be set free from the sufferings that weigh upon me, and so be able to rejoice with you. (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

His wish, we noted was granted. He returned to his people

and worked among them for many more years, tireless in his faith and love.

ST. JOHN MARY VIANNEY, PRIEST

In the winter, he spent ten to twelve hours daily in the confessional. In summer it was as many as sixteen hours. This tells of the dedication of the holy priest we honor today, St. John Vianney (1786-1839). God "made him outstanding in his priestly zeal and concern" for his people. (Opening Prayer).

Born in 1786 at Lyons, France, John was ordained a priest in 1815 after much difficulty in studies, due to the intercession of a priest and the decision that "his goodness was sufficient to offset his deficiencies in learning." After the death of the Abbé Balley, who had interceded for him, John Vianney was appointed curé of Ars (1817), where he remained until his death in 1839.

John set himself the task of waging war on religious indifference, immorality and frivolity, and eventually he reformed the entire village. Word of his goodness and his gift of insight into the minds and souls of people led to many seeking him for confession and spiritual direction. His life belonged to these people who entrusted their souls to him. He had little time for a private life and longed often for a life of solitude. He left the village several times, but always came back. Constantly throughout his priestly life he struggled with the devil. That suffering was added to the cross of disparagement by his superiors and his questioning of his own ability.

Though he was engaged actively in the confessional the greater part of every day, John had an appreciation of prayer, and he expresses it in his *Catechism of Prayer*. There we read:

"This is the glorious duty of man: to pray and to love. If you pray and love, that is where a man's happiness lies. Prayer is nothing else but union with God. . . This union of God with a tiny creature is a lovely thing. It is happiness beyond understanding. . . Through prayer we receive a foretaste of heaven and something of paradise comes down upon us." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Liturgical prayer he saw as especially efficacious:

“Private prayer is like straw scattered here and there; if you set it on fire it makes a lot of little flames. But gather these straws into a bundle and light them, and you get a mighty fire, rising like a column into the sky; public prayer is like that.”

The suggested gospel reading for today (Matthew 9:35-10:1) is most appropriate and applicable to St. John Vianney, model priest and pastor, faithful follower of the Good Shepherd. What was said of Jesus may be said of John: “He proclaimed the good news of God’s reign, and he cured every sickness and disease. At the sight of the crowd his heart was moved to pity.”

ST. SIXTUS II, POPE AND MARTYR & COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

A letter to St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, tells of the martyrdom of Pope Sixtus II, in the year 258, during the persecution of Valerian. "I must inform you that Sixtus was put to death in a catacomb on the sixth of August and four deacons with him." Sixtus had been bishop of Rome for one year. At the time he was siezed and beheaded he was celebrating the Eucharist.

In this same letter which we read in today's Office of Readings Cyprian tells of the severity of the persecution and the punishment meted out to the christians: "The prefects in Rome are pressing this persecution zealously and without intermission to such a point that anyone brought before them is punished and his property is claimed by the treasury."

This letter of Cyprian was meant to prepare the churches in North Africa for persecution there. "I ask you to make these facts known to the rest of the bishops, in order that by the exhortation of their pastors the brethren everywhere may be strengthened and prepared for the spiritual combat. Let all our people fix their minds not on death but rather on immortality; let them commit themselves to the Lord in complete faith and unflinching courage and make their confession with joy rather than in fear, knowing that in this contest the soldiers of God and Christ are not slain but rather win their crowns."

Such letters gave great encouragement to the christian communities. St. Cyprian was a respected leader in the Church of North Africa and a few weeks after writing of the martyrdom of St. Sixtus and his four deacons, suffered martyrdom himself on September 14, 258.

Again we ask for the grace to believe in Jesus, and for the courage to profess our faith in our life circumstances in witness to Jesus. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. CAJETAN, PRIEST

St. Cajetan of Thiene (1480-1547), founder of the Theatine monks, was educated in the law at the University of Padua, and after a brief political career as senator in Vicenza, accepted a post in the papal curia in 1506. After seven years he decided to become a priest and was ordained at age 36. He had already associated himself with a fraternity of devout priests, and took great interest in the needs of the poor, the sick and the elderly in need in Verona and Venice.

Several years later in Rome he founded his religious community which was interested in needed reforms in the Church through preaching and improving the state of the clergy. Cajetan and his companions saw these as pressing needs and addressing them would lead to true and lasting reforms. In many respects he anticipated the reformation mandated by the Council of Trent.

His writings are mostly exhortatory. To Elizabeth Porto he wrote expressing his own inner spirit:

"If you want Christ to love you and help you, you must love him and always make an effort to please him. Do not waver in your purpose. . . he will always be near you, whatever your needs. You know, of course, that we are pilgrims in this world, on a journey to our true home in heaven. . . While living here we should strive to gain eternal life." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Cajetan had a deep appreciation of the Holy Eucharist. He expresses that in the same letter:

Jesus "has offered himself to be our food. How wretched is the man who knows nothing of such a gift! To us has been given the opportunity to receive Christ, son of the Virgin Mary, and we refuse him. . . My daughter, I want what is good for myself; I beg the same for you."

At another time he wrote: "I will not rest until I see Christians rush like starving people to priests in order to let themselves be filled with the Eucharist." He was distressed that so many people

of good will in his day were ashamed to be seen at Confession or Holy Communion.

One final interesting note regarding Cajetan's concern for the poor. He established in Naples the first christian pawn shop, a "fund of piety," to protect the poor from the abuses of money lenders. The poor could leave items as security for a money loan. He and his followers wanted to be poor with the poor. To his relatives he wrote: "I see Christ poor and me rich, him despised and me honored. I want to come a step closer to him and have decided to give up all that I still possess of earthly good."

St. Cajetan and his followers earned the respect of ecclesiastical and civil authorities and the love of the poor they served.

The Responsory to the Second Reading in the Office of Readings calls us to "praise the fame of this holy man and his boundless love. Turning aside worldly pleasures, he gained eternal life. For to him life was Christ, and death was gain."

ST. DOMINIC, PRIEST

"Dominic possessed such great integrity and was so strongly motivated by divine love, that without a doubt he proved to be a bearer of honor and grace." This is written of our saint for today. In the same collection of writings we read: "Wherever he went he showed himself in word and deed to be a man of the Gospel. . . He seldom spoke unless it was of God, that is, in prayer, or about God; and in this manner he instructed his brothers." (Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Dominic (1170-1221), is popularly known as a great preacher and the founder of the Dominicans. His own efforts as preacher and those of his immediate followers were directed to combating the heresies of the Albigensians who denied the Incarnation of Jesus, and repudiated the sacraments, and held other extremist ascetical views.

From childhood Dominic showed signs of a vocation, which was encouraged. He also gave evidence of a great concern for the poor. During a time of hunger he sold his books, precious items at his time, to feed the poor. Like St. Francis of Assisi he saw poverty in practice as a remedy for many of the ills that afflicted the Church in the late 12th and early 13th centuries.

Not only was Dominic a capable and inspiring preacher, but his life was exemplary. Holiness of life was a weapon against error as well as his preaching. Dominic's ideal was to combine prayer and asceticism with study and the ministry of preaching. What one preached is learned in prayer and contemplation. "Bring to others what you contemplate," is the motto he gave to the Order he founded. His last years were spent organizing his followers into a community, the Order of Preachers.

The spirit and ideals of St. Dominic are alive today in the community he founded. Pope Gregory IX said of him: "I knew him as a steadfast following of the apostolic way of life. There is no doubt that he is in heaven, sharing the glory of the apostles themselves."

We pray that his “holiness and teaching” will “come to the aid of” the Church, and that “he help us now with his prayers as he once inspired people by his preaching.” (Opening Prayer).

ST. LAWRENCE, DEACON, MARTYR

In the year 258, four days after the death of Pope Sixtus II and four of his deacons, whose feast we celebrated five days ago, St. Lawrence, his archdeacon, was martyred. We know of Lawrence only through some details given of the four days between the death of St. Sixtus and Lawrence's own martyrdom. He is mentioned by St. Augustine, St. Ambrose and others, and we are told that he was distressed that he did not suffer together with Sixtus and the others.

Legend takes over from there: Lawrence gave the possessions of the Church to the poor, and when arrested he was told to produce the treasures of the Church. Lawrence asked for three days to produce it, and then gathered together the poor, the widows and orphans, the blind, the lame and the lepers and presented them to the Roman Prefect. The angered prefect condemned Lawrence to a very cruel punishment — he was to be roasted alive.

The late fourth century christian writer and poet, Prudentius, extols St. Lawrence in a hymn, and says his death and example led to the end of paganism and the conversion of Rome. That recalls a sentence from our gospel for this feast: "Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit." (John 12:24-25).

Legendary is Lawrence's concern for the poor, and that is noted, too, in the First Reading at Mass and in the Responsorial Psalm. As we read Paul's writing to the Corinthians, the words apply to St. Lawrence: "He scattered abroad and gave to the poor, his justice endures forever." (2 Cor. 9:9). Paul was alluding to Psalm 112:9: "Lavishly he gives to the poor; his generosity shall endure forever; his horn shall be exalted in glory."

Devotion to St. Lawrence spread rapidly through the western Church. That is confirmed by the rank given this feast, and the fact that a vigil is retained even in the most recent revision of the liturgical calendar.

In a homily for the anniversary of the triumph of St. Lawrence, St. Augustine reminds us that we should not despair, thinking that God has not called us to martyrdom. All of us do not have the opportunity to follow Christ by the shedding of our blood; we are “not called upon to undergo the great test of the martyr’s sufferings.” but we all are called to follow after Christ. How? St. Augustine continues: “Christ humbled himself. Christian, that is what you must make your own. ‘Christ became obedient’ How is it that you are proud?” (Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

We honor today St. Lawrence who served God by love and God crowned his life with glorious martyrdom. “Father, help us to be like him in loving you and doing your work.” (Opening Prayer).

ST. CLARE, VIRGIN

Next to St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare (1193-1253) was most responsible for the growth and spread of the Franciscans and the Franciscan ideal. Born in Assisi of wealthy parents, Clare refused to marry in her early teens. A few years later after hearing a sermon by Francis of Assisi, she fled her home to join him and his followers and to live the life of gospel poverty.

Francis received her and gave her the veil at the Portiuncula chapel in Assisi on Palm Sunday in the year 1212. Clare was 19 years old. She was shortly joined by her sister, and resisted several attempts by her family to force them to return home. Later she was joined by another sister and her mother at the convent at the church of San Damiano. Francis charged her under obedience to accept the office of abbess, which she then held the rest of her life — for approximately 40 years.

Clare's understanding of poverty, embodied in the Rule of the Poor Clare Nuns today, is rather strict. She was a respected religious person of her time, and was credited with many miracles throughout her life, notably the saving of her convent and the town of Assisi from the Saracen invaders by placing the Blessed Sacrament on the walls of the convent.

St. Clare was exemplary in prayer, patient in suffering, enduring an illness of thirty years that was quite confining, yet she was a spirited, energetic leader and spiritual guide. She is portrayed as always loving, kind and charitable toward her sisters, joyful and humble at all times. She was motivated always by her love of the gospel ideal of simplicity of life after the example of Jesus.

This is all beautifully expressed in a letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague, daughter of the king of Bohemia, and abbess at a convent she established in Prague: Christ is a mirror "without cloud."

"Queen and bride of Jesus Christ, look into that mirror daily and study well your reflection, that you may adorn yourself, mind and body, with an enveloping garment of

every virtue, and this find yourself attired in flowers and gowns befitting the daughter and most chaste bride of the King on high. In this mirror blessed poverty, holy humility and ineffable love are also reflected. With the grace of God the whole mirror will be your source of contemplation.”
(2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Though written to Agnes, St. Clare was telling us of herself. St. Clare died in 1253, and was canonized just two years after her death.

ST. PONTIAN, POPE, MARTYR & ST. HIPPOLYTUS, PRIEST, MARTYR

Today in our liturgy we honor two saints who are little known to the vast majority of us. They are important to church historians and students of ancient christian literature, and in the case of Hippolytus, to liturgists.

Pontian was bishop of Rome from the year 230. Of interest to historians of theology, he was involved in some theological disputes regarding the outstanding theologian and writer Origen of Alexandria. In the year 235 he was exiled by the emperor and died as a result of harsh treatment in Sardinia and is honored as a martyr.

The second saint of the day, Hippolytus was a Roman priest, a writer of some skill, a vigorous opponent of heresy in print and as a preacher. He quarrelled with Pope Callistus (who died in 222) for not being tough enough with heretics, and even went so far as to have himself elected Bishop of Rome by his followers. He was exiled at the same time as Pontian to Sardinia, and there was reconciled to the Church by Pontian. Hippolytus has the distinction of being the first anti-pope, yet is still honored as a martyr. By liturgists he is remembered as the first one to record in writing in a eucharistic prayer or canon for the Mass. It is of significance to us because it is very similar to our present Eucharistic Prayer II.

Hippolytus is considered to be one of the most important theologians up to the beginning of the fourth century. Justin and Irenaeus would be the others. His writings tell us also much about Roman liturgy and the structure of the Church in the second and third centuries.

Hippolytus died in the same year as Pontian, and like him is honored as a martyr. The year was 235.

Hippolytus is such an important writer that it would be unforgivable to let the day on which we commemorate him, pass without a reference to his writings. It is difficult to choose; he had a very exalted notion of the church, and in refuting heresies he sets out to prove the Church to be the bearer of truth

and the apostolic succession of the bishops the guarantee of her teaching. I choose then a passage from his work, *On Antichrist*, in which there is a rather poetic paragraph in which he sees the Church as a ship sailing toward the east and the heavenly paradise, guided by Christ, its pilot:

“The sea is the world, in which the Church is set, like a ship tossed in the deep, but not destroyed, for she has with her the skilled Pilot, Christ. And she bears in her midst also the trophy (which is erected) over death; for she carries with her the cross of the Lord. For her prow is the east, and her stern is the west, and her hold is the south, and her tillers are the two Testaments; and the ropes that stretch around her are the love of Christ, which binds the Church; and the net which she bears with her is the laver of regeneration which renews the believing. As a splendid sail, the Spirit from heaven is present, by whom those who believe are sealed; she has also anchors of iron accompanying her, i.e., holy commandments of Christ Himself, which are strong as iron. She also has mariners on the right and on the left, assessors like the holy angels, by whom the Church is always governed and defended. The ladder in her leading up to the sailyard is an emblem of the Passion of Christ, which brings the faithful to the ascent to heaven. And the topsails aloft upon the yard are the company of prophets, martyrs and apostles, who have entered into their rest in the kingdom of Christ,” (*De antichristo*, 59. Quoted by J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2, p. 203).

Here is a closing thought from St. Cyprian, from a letter: “How blessed is this Church of ours, so honored and illuminated by God and ennobled in these our days by the glorious blood of martyrs. In earlier times it shone white with the good deeds of our brethren, and now it is adorned with the red blood of martyrs. Let each of us, then, strive for the highest degree of glory, whichever be the honor for which he is destined. May all Christians be found worthy of either the pure white crown of a holy life or the royal red crown of martyrdom” (Letter 10, 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE, PRIEST, MARTYR

Pope John Paul II began his homily at the Mass of canonization of Maximilian Kolbe, Franciscan priest, with words from the Gospel of John (15:13): "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." St. Maximilian Kolbe "was granted the grace of carrying out these words of the Redeemer in an absolutely literal manner."

Briefly, the details of the life of Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941). Born on January 7, 1894 near Lodz, Poland, he thought of priesthood early, and realized his goal, being ordained a Conventual Franciscan priest in 1918. His first years as priest he lectured in Church History, and founded a pious society of clerics and laity, the Knights of the Immaculata, and edited a publication, *Knight of the Immaculata*. He later established both the society and the publication in Japan and India. Throughout his early years as a priest he struggled with illness, but was patient and obedient. His love for and devotion to Mary Immaculate were a compelling force in his personal spiritual life and ministry.

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II he was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in Aushwitz (1941). There he voluntarily took the place of a married man with a family who had been arbitrarily condemned to death in retaliation for the escape of a prisoner. After some weeks of harsh treatment Maximilian was murdered by lethal injection. The man whose place he took survived the imprisonment and the war.

"With zeal for souls and love for his neighbor" Maximilian Kolbe, "this devoted servant of Mary Immaculate," served others for the glory of God. (Cf. Opening Prayer). Maximilian Kolbe was canonized by Pope John Paul II on October 10, 1982.

In his homily at the Mass of canonization the Pope said: "Maximilian prepared for (his) definitive sacrifice by following Christ from the first years of his life in Poland. From these years comes the mysterious vision of two

crowns — one white and one red. From these our saint does not choose. He accepts them both. From the years of his youth, in fact, Maximilian was filled with the great love of Christ and the desire for martyrdom. . .”

His desire was fulfilled, August 14, 1941. The following day his body was cremated: “Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.” (Ps. 116:15).

ST. STEPHEN OF HUNGARY

The first king of Hungary, crowned on Christmas Day in the year 1000 with a crown sent by Pope Sylvester II, St. Stephen (969-1038) is a national hero as well. To him goes the credit for establishing his country as an independent kingdom and integrating it into Europe. This was a work begun by his father who with his ten year old son was baptized about 985.

Once he had secured peace for his country as its king at the turn of the century, he introduced christian principles into government. He took great interest in the spread of the Church, founding centers of missionary and spiritual life. He was aided in this by his wife Gisele, sister of St. Henry, who became the Holy Roman Emperor about the same time in 1002. His own son was Blessed Emeric who was to succeed him, but who was killed in a hunting accident in his early twenties. He also shared his father's ideals and interest in the spread of christianity in Hungary.

To Emeric, Stephen wrote, and in these admonitions we get a glimpse of Stephen's faith and his concern for the poor and needy:

"My dearest son, if you wish to honor the royal crown. . . I urge you above all things to maintain the Catholic and apostolic faith with such diligence and care that you may be an example for all those placed under you by God. . .

Stephen goes on to explain that the Church needs "prudent and trustworthy guardians" lest she should be destroyed through "idleness, indolence and neglect." He continued to offer counsel to guide his behavior to the poor and to all:

"Show favor not only to relations and kin, or to the most eminent. . .but also to foreigners and to all who come to you. . .Be merciful to all who are suffering violence. . .Be patient with everyone. . .Be strong. . .Be humble. . .Be truly moderate. . .Be gentle so that you may never oppose justice. Be honorable so that you may never voluntarily bring disgrace upon anyone. Be chaste. . .All these virtues. . .make

up the royal crown and without them no one is fit to rule here on earth or attain to the heavenly kingdom." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Reading exhortations such as this, of Stephen to his son, gives us an appreciation of what committed faith can accomplish in one who sincerely strives to live in the spirit of the gospels. The concern of the Church for us is evident in offering us the saints as models to be admired and imitated, and intercessors to be our powerful helpers in heaven.

ST. JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL, RELIGIOUS

She was a wife, mother, nun, and foundress of the Visitation Sisters. The life of St. Jane de Chantal (1572-1641) was extraordinary and would have tested the faith and patience of many a saint. Three of her six children died in infancy; her husband was killed after seven years of marriage; her father-in-law was a difficult and disagreeable tyrant.

When Jane de Chantal met Francis de Sales she was 32 years old and he became her spiritual director. She desired to enter the Carmelites, but Francis persuaded her not to do so. In 1607 he explained to her his idea of a new congregation that he wished to found. He wanted to make it possible for women to enter religious life whose age, health and other circumstances could not bear the severe discipline of convent life. After putting her affairs into order and providing for her children, the foundation began. Originally the congregation of the Visitation was to actively engage in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, in imitation of Mary at the Visitation of Elizabeth. Opposition necessitated that it be a cloistered community. (St. Vincent de Paul would effectively break with this tradition when he established his Sisters of Charity).

St. Vincent de Paul wrote of her:

"She was full of faith, yet all her life had been tormented by thoughts against it. While apparently enjoying the peace and easiness of mind of souls who have reached a high state of virtue, she suffered such interior trials that she often told me her mind was so filled with all sorts of temptations and abominations that she had to strive not to look within herself. . . But for all that suffering her face never lost its serenity, nor did she once relax in the fidelity God asked of her. And so I regard her as one of the holiest souls I have ever met on this earth."

In her life, the example the gentleness of St. Francis de Sales is discernible, as is his practical spirituality. He wrote his *Treatise on*

the love of God for the Visitation Congregation, a work on spirituality appreciated even today.

From St. Jane herself we gain insight into her idealism and spirituality. From an instruction given to her nuns and recorded by her secretary we read:

“Many of our holy fathers in the faith. . . did not die martyrs. Why do you think this was? . . . Well, I myself think it was because there is another martyrdom: the martyrdom of love. Here God keeps his servants and handmaids in this present life so that they may labor for him, and he makes of them both martyrs and confessors.”

When asked to explain further, she said:

“Yield yourself fully to God, and you will find out! Divine love takes its sword to the hidden recesses of our inmost soul and divides us from ourselves. I know one person whom love cut off from all that was dearest to her, just as completely and effectively as if a tyrant’s blade has severed spirit from body.”

Her secretary then noted: “We realize that she was speaking of herself.”

St. Jane continued after being asked whether the martyrdom of which she spoke could be equated with martyrdom of the body. She said:

“We should not worry about equality. I do think however, that the martyrdom of love can be relegated to a second place for *love is as strong as death*. For the martyrs of love suffer infinitely more in remaining in this life so as to serve God, than if they died a thousand times over in testimony to their faith and love and fidelity.” (All reference are from *Memoirs of the Life and Virtues of St. Jane Frances de Chantal*, by Francoise-Madeleine de Chaugy; Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

We pray today through the intercession of St. Jane Frances de Chantal “to remain faithful in our vocation.” What she said we can all take to heart, striving to live our lives in “faith, love and fidelity” along the paths on which God leads us.

ST. JOHN EUDES, PRIEST

"Father, you chose the priest John Eudes to preach the infinite riches of Christ. (Opening Prayer).

St. John Eudes (1601-1860) was ordained a priest in the Congregation of the Oratory in 1625 and spent his first years as a priest caring for the victims of plague, then for a decade he was a parish missionary, an enthusiastic preacher. This seventeenth century priest knew the needs of the Church as indicated by the Council of Trent. It mandated the reforms which St. John Eudes set himself to bring about through preaching spiritual renewal. He also worked to provide for better education and spiritual formation of priests who would in turn be better preachers and spiritual guides for the people.

This renewal-minded priest hoped to realize his ideals through the religious community he founded, the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. Part of John's ministry led him to a concern for street people, especially women held in bondage to a life of prostitution. A woman named Madeleine Lamy who had provided care for several of them challenged John one day: "Where are you off to now? To some church, where you will gaze at the images and think yourself pious? And all the time what is really wanted of you is a decent house for these poor creatures." John listened, and eventually was able to establish a community of women to provide shelter and care. This community today, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, continues this work.

At the core of John's preaching, and the great spiritual support of his life, was his love of Jesus Christ. This was expressed in devotion to the pierced open Heart of Jesus. John wrote: "Our wish, our object, our chief preoccupation must be to form Jesus in ourselves, to make his spirit, his devotion, his affections, his desires and his disposition live and reign there." For John, Jesus was the source of holiness, and Mary was the model of the Christian life. Through his writings and preaching he promoted the liturgical cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

His personal devotion was fervent, and it sustained him through many criticisms, difficulties and rejections throughout his life. He persevered by being "one with Jesus."

To his religious and to all who would hear him, he wrote:

"You belong to the Son of God, but more than that, you ought to be in him as the members are in the head. All that is in you must be incorporated into him. There will be no true life for you except in him, for he is the one source of true life. Apart from him you will find only death and destruction. Let him be the only source of your movements, of the actions and strength of your life." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

St. John Eudes died on August 19, 1680. He was canonized in 1925 by Pope Pius XI and recognized as the one who initiated the liturgical cult of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

ST. BERNARD, ABBOT, DOCTOR

Without doubt, Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) would have been "man of the year" on more than one occasion, and most probably "man of the century." To be all that he was, to accomplish all that he did, and to leave such a mark on history, not just for his time but for centuries, speaks well of this saint.

By the time he was 25 years old he was abbot of the new monastery at Clairvaux which he had founded, and he soon became the dominant and most influential religious person in western Europe, and in the political sphere as well.

Within his monastic community Bernard was responsible for the survival of the ancient monastery of Citeaux. He entered it in the year 1112, taking 30 of his friends and relatives, including four of his brothers, with him. He revitalized and brought reform to the Cistercian Order. By the year of his death in 1153, 68 new monasteries were founded from Clairvaux. That alone would be the tribute to the holiness and influence of this saint.

There is more, however. He was the greatest preacher of his time, using his knowledge and skill to combat heresy, heal schism and settle disputes both in and outside the Church. He was urged by the pope to preach for the Second Crusade, and that the Crusade failed, was not the fault of Bernard.

Despite his skills as an arbiter and peacemaker he had his critics. One critic, considering him too moderate, said to him: "You habitually take the middle way between the various parties opposed to one another." But Bernard's success could not be faulted. An appreciation of him was written by Dom Jean LeClercq:

"The truth lies in Bernard's inner conflict: he had to be the master of an exceptionally many-sided nature, to reconcile different talents, and with many gifts to remain single-minded. This resulted in his being able to take up various attitudes and different activities. His was the nervousness of a sick man, the ardour of a man of action, and an exaggerated sensibility coupled with the acuteness of a brilliant intelligence. Above all, in the midst of these contrasts, and thanks to the conflict they imposed, he lived intensely the mystery of Jesus Christ. His health caused him acute

physical suffering and daily humiliations; to these were added exterior and interior conflicts, and the great anguish of not possessing God in the full measure of his desire. The power of Christ shown forth in Bernard, giving him a supernatural prestige and an influence which can only be explained in terms of a testimony to the resurrection of him in which Passion he shared profoundly." (*The Spirituality of the Middle Ages* v. 2 of *A History of Christian Spirituality*, p. 192).

He was a brilliant writer and eminent and eloquent preacher. His letters are grand and his sermons intense. One writer says that "he thinks like the Scriptures and speaks like them." He never tired of telling of the divine life communicated to us in Jesus Christ, and his devotion to Mary is movingly revealed in much of his preaching.

The antiphons that we find in the morning and evening prayer of his feastday are a tribute to St. Bernard:

"Blessed Bernard, your life, flooded by the splendor of the divine Word, illumines the Church with the light of true faith and doctrine." (Ant. at *Benedictus*).

"Bernard, eloquent doctor of the Church, friend of Christ the Bridegroom, eminent preacher of the Virgin Mothers's glory, at Clairvaux you became the illustrious shepherd of your followers." (Ant. at *Magnificat*).

A closing comment is provided again from Dom Jean LeClercq:

"The seductive originality of his work comes from his own gifts — a mixture of enthusiasm and clear seeing, vigorous speculation and simplicity of outlook, emotion and self-mastery. He did not experience visions; he knew ecstasy. . . He was simply an exceptional man who lived with a deep and complete generosity the mystery of Christ. . . The judgement of his contemporaries is confirmed; Bernard was a man of God: with all his gifts he had renounced all things, and through he had certain weaknesses, he was a man moved by the power of the Lord." (*Op. Cit.* p. 194).

"Heavenly Father, St. Bernard was filled with zeal for your house and was a radiant light in your Church." We pray that "we be filled with this spirit of zeal and walk always as children of light." (Opening Prayer).

ST. PIUS X, POPE

"To defend the Catholic faith and make all things new in Christ" was the task that St. Pius X set for himself. His motto "To renew all things in Christ" was the guiding principle of his reign as pope, and that is noted in the Opening Prayer of Mass.

Giuseppe Sarto (1835-1914) was born to poor parents. He entered the seminary at age 15 and was ordained in 1858 at age 23. For seventeen years he was a parish priest, then chancellor of his diocese. Appointed Bishop of Mantua in 1884, he endeared himself to his people by his gentleness and warmth as he went about renewing his diocese. Ten years later he was named Cardinal and Patriarch of Venice, and in 1903 was chosen to be Pope.

It was a time that called for strength in leadership in the Church and this humble saint was equal to the challenge. The opening prayer of the Mass recognizes that he was filled with "heavenly wisdom and apostolic courage." He met the needs of the Church and the needs in society. Primarily he turned to the spiritual needs of the Church and is remembered as the pope who encouraged frequent reception of Holy Communion, especially by children, and he urged that they receive this wonderful sacrament as early as possible.

Of great interest to us today is the personal initiative that he took and encouraged in liturgical matters. He initiated reforms of liturgical books, a revision of the text of the psalms, and he encouraged an active participation of the laity in the celebration of mass. It is known that he was convinced of the value of the vernacular in the liturgy, but thought the time was not yet right for its use. Much of what he envisioned and encouraged is a reality for us today.

In the internal affairs of the Church he gave impetus to the codification of Church law. He took a strong stand against interference in the internal affairs of the Church by governments, especially France. He was concerned also for the correct teaching

of catholic doctrine and the strong catechetical formation of the youth. He encouraged the serious and critical study of the Scriptures.

The years of the pontificate of Pope St. Pius X were difficult, but he untiringly gave of himself "in the spirit of simplicity, poverty and courage, arousing the faithful to a Christian way of life and waging constant warfare against the errors of his age." (Cf. note in *The Liturgy of the Hours*). He was a gentle and sensitive shepherd after the model of Jesus the Good Shepherd. An historian wrote of him: he was "a man of God who knew the unhappiness of the world and the hardships of life, and in the greatness of his heart wanted to comfort everyone."

We have been blessed with great and competent popes in our century. They have been teachers, spiritual giants, inspiring guides, courageous and zealous preachers. Above all they have been holy pastors. And today we are privileged to honor the first of the 20th century popes, the gentle, sensitive, pastoral Pius X.

ST. ROSE OF LIMA, VIRGIN

"To shame the wise, God chose what the world considers foolish. God chose those who were nothing at all to humble those who were everything." (Response to 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*; Cf. 1 Cor. 1:27-28).

By today's standards, and very probably by those of her day, the sanity of St. Rose of Lima (1586-1617) would have been questioned. At least her behavior was judged to be strange, because it made other people uncomfortable. The saints can do that to us, but Rose was at peace with God, regardless.

Born in Lima, Peru of Spanish parents, her life was one of penance and prayer. Reputedly a very beautiful young woman, she resisted the efforts of her parents to have her marry. Imprudently, perhaps, she disfigured herself to appear unattractive. Rose's parents refused to allow her to enter religious life, and she obeyed them. But then she chose to live as a recluse in a garden shack practicing great austerity, and spending long hours daily in prayer. She did become a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic.

The genuine holiness of this young woman attracted many to her. One writer said of her that we should "remember the greatest thing about her: a love of God so ardent that it withstood ridicule from without, violent temptation and lengthy periods of sickness." During her last years, even though she was ill herself, she cared for homeless children, the elderly and the sick. She died at the age of 31 in 1617, and was canonized in 1671. She is regarded as the first saint of the Americas and she is honored as the patroness of South America.

St. Rose "gave up everything to devote herself to a life of penance." (Opening Prayer). Rose was graced with many mystical gifts which she humbly received, and she was so judged by Inquisitors. She had a profound influence on the spiritual life of her city, where she is greatly revered still today. Who would dare say that she was not led by the grace of God to "her selfless

way of life” which seems strange to us perhaps, but not to God?

St. Rose of Lima’s appreciation of the role of suffering is revealed in a letter of a Dr. Castillo to whom she wrote:

“If only mortals would learn how great it is to possess divine grace, how beautiful, how noble, how precious. How many riches it hides within itself, how many joys and delights! Without doubt they would devote all their care and concern to winning for themselves pain and afflictions. All men throughout the world would seek trouble, infirmities and torments, instead of good fortune, in order to attain the unfathomable treasure of grace. This is the reward and the final gain of patience. No one would complain about his cross or about troubles that may happen to him, if he would come to know the scales on which they are weighed when they are distributed to men.” (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

The spirituality of St. Rose is revealed in these words very well. She was willing to give up all for the love of God with an intensity that we must admire and with a dedication that we can imitate. We can “imitate her selfless way of life on earth” and thus share her blessedness in heaven. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. BARTHOLOMEW, APOSTLE

We honor today one of the twelve apostles, St. Bartholomew. He was the Nathaniel in the Gospel of St. John, who was brought to Jesus by Philip. A note in *The Liturgy of the Hours* says that he was born in Cana, and the *Roman Martyrology* tells us that he preached the gospel in India as well as Armenia, where he was flayed alive and beheaded.

On feasts of the apostles of Jesus we are always reminded of a characteristic virtue of these first followers of Jesus, the virtue of zeal. These men ventured forth, filled with the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the salvation won for us by Jesus. St. John Chrysostom explains this zeal by saying that the Holy Spirit enlightened them as to the meaning of the Cross. He wrote:

"It was clear through unlearned men that the cross was persuasive, in fact, it persuaded the whole world.

"Paul had this in mind when he said: 'The weakness of God is stronger than men.' That the preaching of these men was indeed divine is brought home to us in the same way. For how otherwise could twelve uneducated men, who lived on lakes and rivers and wastelands, get the idea for such an immense enterprise? How could men who perhaps had never been in a city or a public square think of setting out to do battle with the whole world?" (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

The apostles were, witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus and for this reason were driven men. Zeal, at any rate, is a driving power or an emotion at work, and in the apostles of Jesus it was motivated by a very pure love of God. It was in them a virtue devoid of selfishness.

Their zeal is a reminder and a challenge for us to be active witnesses to Jesus' power over us. Zeal in us is supported by our faith, and in turn it sustains our faith. May it "sustain within us the faith which made St. Bartholomew every loyal to Christ," so that we may be "the sign of salvation for all the nations of the world." (Cf. Opening Prayer).



ST. LOUIS

Born in the year 1214, Louis became King of France twenty years later. The greatest influence in his life was his mother, Blanche, who was his regent for eight years after the death of his father. When he reached the age of 20 he was able to assume the throne, and Blanche continued to be his advisor.

Louis' wars and political astuteness are well treated in history books, and are not our concern here. We do associate him with crusades, and he was once captured and ransomed. Louis is better remembered however, for his personal piety, his justice and charity, and especially for his lifelong generosity to the poor of his realm. We may note, too, that his nation prospered throughout his forty-four year reign.

Louis and his wife, Margaret, were the parents of eleven children, all raised and well instructed in the faith. They were imbued with principles of christian life, mainly by the example of Louis and Margaret, and Louis' mother, Blanche.

In a spiritual testament to his son we find instruction for all of us:

"My first instruction is that you should love the Lord your God with all your heart and all you strength. Without this there is no salvation. . .Keep yourself from everything that displeases God. . .If the Lord has permitted you to have some trial, bear it willingly and with gratitude, considering that it has happened for your good. . .Be kindhearted to the poor, the unfortunate and the afflicted. Give them as much help and consolation as you can. . .Be just to your subjects . . . Be devout and obedient to our mother the Church. . . Work to remove all sin from your land. . .(2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

While reading the instruction we know that St. Louis is teaching from his own life and experience.

He was pious, prayerful, charitable, and intensely loyal to the Church. This is what we recall about St. Louis, King of France.

He died in 1270, and was canonized in 1297. Spiritual tribute is given to him in the Responsory following the Second Reading in *The Liturgy of the Hours*:

“He did what was pleasing in the sight of the Lord; among all kings none could compare with him. He was loyal to the Lord and never turned away from him. The Lord was with him, because he kept his commandments.”

ST. JOSEPH CALASANZ, PRIEST

The Opening Prayer of Mass tells us that St. Joseph Calasanz (1556-1648) was "dedicated. . .to the formation of christian youth," and that he was a "teacher of wisdom."

This saint was concerned for the young, especially the poor boys of Rome and was a model of charity and patience. He endured many trials, withstood prejudices and jealousies even within the religious community he founded to carry out his work and efforts for the poor. So convinced of the importance of his work, he willingly suffered even the suppression of his religious institute, trusting that vindication would follow. His community, The Clerics Regular of Religious Schools, or Piarists, was restored some twenty years after his death.

His greatest concern was to provide an education for young boys and to form them in the christian life, "to protect the young from evil. . .to rouse and attract them. . .to the performance of good works." Joseph referred to this as a "holy ministry in which young boys, especially the poor, receive instruction for the purpose of attaining eternal life."

For those to whom this ministry was entrusted he wrote:

"All who undertake to teach must be endowed with deep love, the greatest patience and, most of all, profound humility. They must perform their work with earnest zeal. Then, through their humble prayers, the Lord will find them worthy to become fellow workers with him in the cause of truth. He will console them in the fulfillment of this most noble duty, and, finally, will enrich them with the gift of heaven. (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

All teachers may take encouragement from St. Joseph Calasanz, and "follow his example in working for truth." (Opening Prayer). Joseph saw the results of such dedication as an enhancement of the human dignity of the young. He also regarded it as benefiting parents, society as a whole, and the Church. He was "especially joyful that others who love Christ and proclaim the Gospel are added to its following."

ST. MONICA

St. Monica (331-387) was born in Teggaste (Numidia) in Africa of Christian parents. Married at an early age to a pagan, Patricius, she had three children, the oldest of whom was St. Augustine.

Monica's life was a difficult one. She patiently suffered through the dissolute life of her husband and the abuse from her mother-in-law. Her piety and patient charity won the conversion of Patricius a year before his death, and the conversion of his mother as well.

Disturbed by Augustine's rejection of Christianity, she intensified her piety and penance, guided by the wise and gentle bishop Ambrose of Milan. She lived to see Augustine return to Catholicism and be baptized.

St. Monica is honored as a model for virtuous Christian mothers, and as one who nourished her faith by her prayers and witnessed to it by her deeds. (*The Liturgy of the Hours*). "While in this world, Monica lived in Christ; the goodness of her life was so evident that the name of the Lord was praised in her faith and in her works." (Antiphon at *Magnificat*).

St. Monica died in 387, the year of Augustine's baptism.

"You answered her prayers, O Lord, you did not disregard her tears which fell upon the earth wherever she prayed." (Antiphon at *Benedictus*).

ST. AUGUSTINE, BISHOP AND DOCTOR

"Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace" (from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine).

"Augustine is undoubtedly the greatest of the Fathers and one of the great geniuses of humanity, whose influence on posterity has been continuous and profound." (A. Trape, in *Patrology*, v. 4, p. 343, ed. by Angelo DiBerardino). He was a philosopher, theologian, mystic, poet, writer, orator and saint.

Born in 354 in Numidia, probably African by race as well as by birth, he was thoroughly Roman "by language, culture and persuasion." He received a christian education from his mother, Monica, but did not receive baptism. At age 19 he abandoned christianity, and was even anti-Catholic for a time. He became a teacher of grammar and rhetoric, and for this reason moved to Rome and eventually to Milan. His conversion to Christianity was a long odyssey, and a time of true intellectual searching. The final spark was supplied by the preaching of St. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan. Throughout it all Monica prayed continuously. The final struggle was the choice of how to best live the Christian ideal of wisdom. By the latter part of the year 384 he sought instruction from St. Ambrose and the following Easter was baptised. By then he was 33 years old and a short time later his mother died, her prayers answered.

Augustine took up monastic life, and decided to return to

Hippo, Africa. There he reluctantly accepted ordination to the priesthood at the age of 36. He continued his monastic life while studying theology and beginning his apostolate of preaching. Five years later he became the bishop of Hippo.

His activity of the following years was prodigious. He preached often, cared for the poor and orphans, took personal interest in the formation of clergy, established monasteries for men and women, visited the sick, wrote numerous letters and theological treatises, and settled theological controversies.

Pope Pius XI wrote that Augustine was a man "to the likes of whom almost no one, or certainly very few, can be compared of all those who have lived since the beginning of the human race until today." The learned Patrologist B. Altaner is even more effusive:

"The great bishop united in himself the creative energy of Tertullian and the breadth of spirit of Origen with the ecclesiastical sensitivity of Cyprian; the dialectical acumen of Aristotle with the soaring idealism and speculation of Plato; the practical sense of the Latins with the spiritual subtlety of the Greeks. He was the greatest philosopher of the patristic era and, without doubt, the most important and influential theologian of the Church in general. Since his own times, his works have found enthusiastic admirers."

St. Augustine was demanding of himself in ascetical matters, and according to one writer "he was marked by a moderate yet austere asceticism." He humbly acknowledged his errors, and was dedicated to study, prayer and contemplation. As a pastor and bishop, he defined himself as "servant of Christ and servant of the servants of Christ" (Letter 117). He made himself completely available for the needs of his people and to the Church in her struggles and problems. "I do not want to be saved without you," he said to his people. (Sermon 17).

"Lord, renew in your church the spirit you gave St. Augustine. Filled with this spirit, may we thirst for you alone as the fountain of wisdom and seek you as the source of eternal love." (Opening Prayer).

BLESSED JUNIPERO SERRA

In September, 1731, Junipero Serra (1713-1784) professed religious vows. He was known as a pious and intelligent young man. After his ordination in 1738, he pursued graduate studies in theology and then taught theology for about ten years. Fr. Serra was an accomplished preacher, but always had a great desire to be a missionary.

He requested to be assigned to the missions of New Spain. In making his request he wrote: "All my life I have wanted to be a missionary. I have wanted to carry the gospel teachings to those who have never heard of God and the kingdom he has prepared for them. But I became proud and allowed myself to be distracted by academic studies. Now I am filled with remorse that my ambition has been so long delayed."

His wish was granted and he was finally assigned to New Spain. He reached Mexico in 1750. For Father Serra and the Friars who labored with him, the work was arduous, but they were tireless in preaching the gospel and improving the life of the Indians in Mexico and in California.

What they accomplished is impressive; what they did for the Indians admirable. In an essay, "Father of California," Fr. Albert J. Nevins wrote:

"Serra and his friars wanted nothing for themselves but everything for their Indians. They found a people annihilating one another in cannibalistic rituals and brought them into the peace of Christ. They integrated the Indian into their own society and did not destroy him as did the advancing Anglo-Saxons. Those who saw the California missions firsthand — and many of these witnesses were neither Catholic nor Spanish — had nothing but admiration for the work of the padres." (*Builders of Catholic America*, p. 86).

In his homily at the mass of beatification of Father Serra, Pope John Paul II said:

He is "a shining example of Christian virtue and the missionary spirit. His great good was to bring the gospel to the native peoples of America, so that they, too, might be consecrated in the truth."

Pope John Paul II called him an "exemplary model of the selfless evangelizer," and we honor him as one of the great pioneer missionaries of our country. He is given special recognition also as one of the builders of that state of California. A bronze bust of Fr. Serra stands in our nation's Capitol, holding a crucifix in his right hand and a California mission in his left.

It is now our joy to honor Blessed Junipero Serra in liturgy and prayer, and ask his intercession that our efforts for the spread of the gospel message will also bear much fruit.

THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

"God our Father, you called John the Baptist. . .he gave his life in witness to truth and justice." (Opening Prayer).

John the Baptist suffered the fate of many of the ancient prophets — rejection and martyrdom. His death at the hands of Herod was his last great act of witness to Jesus. The prophet from whom we read in our first reading was himself murdered while exercising his ministry in the temple. What the Lord said to Jeremiah was understood also by John the Baptist: "They will fight against you, but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." (Jeremiah 1:19).

We cannot improve on the sermon by St. Bede the Venerable for this day. We read it in the *Liturgy of the Hours*.

"Blessed John showed in his struggle a goodness worthy of the sight of heaven. . .There is no doubt that blessed John suffered imprisonment and chains as a witness to our Redeemer. . .and gave his life for him. His persecutor had demanded not that he should deny Christ, but only that he should keep silent about the truth. Nevertheless, he died for Christ. . .He preached the freedom of heavenly peace."

"So may we strive to profess our faith in the Gospel." (Opening Prayer).

ST. GREGORY THE GREAT, POPE, DOCTOR

"Note that a man whom the Lord sends forth as a preacher is called a watchman. A watchman always stands on a height so that he can see from afar what is coming. Anyone appointed to be a watchman for the people must stand on a height for all his life to help them by his foresight."

These are words from a homily on Ezeckiel by St. Gregory the Great (540-604). They tell us something of this saint and his future vision for the Church and the role of the papacy. Gregory the Great set the tone for the early medieval papacy, as St. Gregory VII would for the late medieval papacy some five hundred years later.

After a career in civil and political service Gregory became a monk in the Roman Monastery of St. Andrew. There he rigorously observed the Benedictine Rule, which he did throughout his life. At the time he was elected Pope he was a junior deacon. He tried to avoid it, but eventually acceded to the wish of the electors and was consecrated on September 3, 590.

As Pope he continued his work on behalf of the poor of the city. He was also involved in civil government and in the spiritual affairs of the Church. It was he who sent Augustine and his monks to evangelize England. To his credit goes the laying of the foundation of what was to become the Papal States. He was tireless and energetic in matters relating to the internal affairs of the Church, providing a model for his bishops. He also enforced clerical celibacy and was an outstanding moral teacher of his time. Besides these activities he took a personal interest in changing and developing the liturgy.

His writings are very pastoral and in one of them entitled *Pastoral Care* he set forth his view of the bishop as shepherd. This work is still highly regarded today. The antiphon at morning prayer states:

"Gregory, an outstanding pastor of the Church, has left us

a splendid example and rule of life, a guide for all who shepherd God's people." (Antiphon at the *Benedictus*).

In his moral and ascetical writings he drew on the Sacred Scriptures. His perspective was always that of the monk. A few sentences from his homilies reveal the spirituality of this pastoral pope: "If the sacrament of the Lord's passion is to work its effect in us, we must imitate what we receive and proclaim to mankind what we revere. The cry of the Lord finds a hiding place in it if our lips fail to speak of this, though our hearts believe in it. So that his cry may not lie concealed in us it remains for us all, each in his own measure, to make known to those around us the mystery of our new life in Christ." (*Moral Reflections on Job*).

"Whatever is vicious must be utterly eradicated, wrenched away not merely from being put into act, but even from being so much as thought of." (from a homily on the gospel). "No matter what obstacles we encounter, we must not allow them to turn us aside from the joy of the heavenly feast. . .Nor must we allow the charm of success to seduce us." (*ibid*). "We make use of temporal things, but our hearts are set on what is eternal." (*ibid*).

The antiphon at evening prayer says:

"Gregory put into practice all that he preached so that he might be a living example of the spiritual message he proclaimed." (Antiphon at the *Magnificat*).

He was a pope of great determination, immense ability and tireless energy. Ill throughout the years of his pontificate, he did not spare himself. One historian wrote of him: "It is impossible to conceive what would have been the confusion, the lawlessness, the chaotic state of the middle ages without the medieval papacy; and of the medieval papacy, the real father is Gregory the Great."

THE BIRTH OF MARY

"Today the Virgin is born, tended and formed and prepared for her role as Mother of God, who is the universal King of the ages. . . Therefore let all creation sing and dance and unite to make worthy contribution to the celebration of this day. . . Today this created world is raised to the dignity of a holy place for him who made all things. The creature is newly prepared to be a divine dwelling place for the Creator." (from a discourse by St. Andrew of Crete).

The liturgy for this feast day is filled with rich praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of Mary. "When the most holy Virgin was born, the whole world was made radiant." (2nd Antiphon at Morning Prayer). "Your birth, O Virgin Mother of God, proclaims joy to the whole world. . ." (Antiphon at the *Benedictus*). "Today we celebrate the birth of the blessed Virgin Mary, whose splendid life has illumined the Church." (Antiphon, midmorning, Daytime Prayer).

In the same midmorning hour we read:

"Who is this that comes forth like the dawn, as beautiful as the moon, as resplendent as the sun, as awe-inspiring as bannered troops?" (*Song of Songs*, 6:10).

The II Vatican Council places in perspective all of our honor to Mary. In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* we find:

"Holy Church honors the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with a special love. She is inseparably linked with her Son's saving work. In her the Church admires and exalts the most excellent fruit of redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be." (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 103).

A short, beautiful reflection on the birth of Mary was written by Eilis Ni Thearnaigh:

"Mary is intimately associated with the great feasts of the Annunciation and Christmas when we celebrate the com-

ing into our world of God's own Son. Today's feast, however, celebrates Mary's own coming into the world and the Church is especially joyful. It is the kind of joy all of us feel when looking at the miracle that each new human life is. This life that is the cause of our joy is altogether special — in its holiness and human perfection and also in its great potential. Seeing this baby girl and knowing God's choice of her, our joy has a quality of anticipation. We look forward to the day when the baby becomes a young woman who is asked to be the mother of the Savior, *Theotokos*. So, though it might not at first seem so, this feast is not simply a glorification of Mary herself, but is closely connected with the mystery of our redemption." (*Scripture in Church*, Vol. 18, n. 67 (1987) p. 324).

One final prayer: "The birth of the Virgin Mary's Son, was the dawn of our salvation. May this celebration of her birthday bring us closer to lasting peace." (Opening Prayer).

ST. PETER CLAVER, PRIEST

St. Peter Claver (1580-1654), a Spanish Jesuit, followed the call to the missions. In the year 1616 he was ordained a priest at Cartagena, Columbia, which was then the center of the slave trade in South America. He worked among the black slaves who were brought there, as many as 10,000 a year. St. Peter Claver devoted his life to relieving their misery with medicines and food, and with zealous concern for their spiritual welfare.

Peter's competence was that of "faithfully serving [the slaves] in charity with the help of God." He was able "to offer them an authentic Christian witness and work for their salvation. . . teaching [them] religious and moral truths, which Christ illumined with his light." (Cf. *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, Ad gentes*, n. 12). It is said that over a period of about 40 years Peter Claver instructed and baptized over 30,000 slaves.

He was ill and exhausted during the last four years of his life, and he died at Cartagena on September 9, 1654. Those who previously looked with scorn on his work, and "called his zeal indiscreet and his energy wasted," vied with one another to honor his memory. He was canonized by Pope Leo XIII in 1888.

We pray through his intercession for an end to "all racial hatreds" so that we may "love each other as brothers and sisters." (Opening Prayer).



ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, BISHOP, DOCTOR

The life and career of St. John Chrysostom (349-407) is one of the most interesting and exciting of the ancient, great teachers of early Christianity. His life and personality have attracted a great multitude of historians, biographers and commentators.

He came from Antioch, was well-educated and pious, and a bit imprudent in mortification. His early fastings as a desert monk caused life-long ailments. John was an outstanding and zealous preacher, and it is in this that he excelled. One writer described him as "outspoken especially when excited in the pulpit." He was a spiritual guide to many, mostly by letter. As bishop he was capable, decisive, very popular with the people, but somewhat rigorous in disciplinary matters. When he was Archbishop of Constantinople, he was often harsh in his criticism of the selfish wealthy and of the excesses of the Byzantine court.

John's preaching, "by word and example, exemplifies the role of the prophet to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable. For honesty and courage he paid the price of a turbulent ministry as bishop, personal vilification and exile," (*Saint of the Day*, v. 2, ed. by Leonard Foley, OFM).

The years of exile at the end of his life hastened his death. He was exiled to Lesser Armenia, and his first biographer, the monk Palladius wrote: "So, when they [his enemies] saw the Church of Antioch migrating to the Church of Armenia, and the gracious wisdom of John chanted from there back again to the Church of Antioch, they longed to cut short his life." They banished him to a wilderness on the Black Sea, where he became worn out by hardships and severe weather. He died on September 14, 407.

His body was brought back in solemn procession to Constantinople in January 438. The *Ecclesiastical History* of Theodoret tells us that the Emperor Theodosius II, son of Eudoxia (the empress responsible for John's exile) went out to meet the funeral procession. "He laid his face upon the coffin, and en-

treated that his parents might be forgiven for their ill-advised persecution of the bishop.”

The patristic scholar Johannes Quasten wrote of John:

“The tragedy of his life caused by the extraordinary sincerity and integrity of his character served but to enhance his glory and fame. He remains the most charming of the Greek Fathers and one of the most congenial personalities of Christian antiquity. His rare gift of eloquence gained him the proud title of ‘Chrysostom,’ ‘Gold Mouth,’ which has almost taken the place of his real name ever since it was first bestowed on him in the sixth century.” (*Patrology*, v. 3, p. 429).

Choosing from the wealth of his preaching is difficult. Most of his writings are sermons on the Old and New Testament Books. They are always intelligent and thought provoking. Here is an example from a homily on the Gospel of St. Matthew:

“Do you want to honor Christ’s body? Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked. For he who said: *This is my body*, and made it so by his words, also said: *You saw me hungry and did not feed me*, and *inasmuch as you did not do it for one of these, the least of by brethren, you did not do it for me*. What we do here in the church requires a pure heart, not special garments; what we do outside requires great dedication.”

One final reference, from a homily given in exile:

“I am not afraid of death nor do I long to live, except for your good. I concentrate therefore on the present situation, and I urge you, my friends, to have confidence. . . Let the world be in upheaval. I hold to his promise and read his message; that is my protecting wall and garrison. What message? *Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world*. If Christ is with me whom shall I fear?

We pray at the beginning of our Mass today that through the intercession of St. John Chrysostom, “renowned for his eloquence and heroic in his sufferings” we may “learn from his teaching and gain courage from his patient endurance.”

ST. CORNELIUS, POPE, MARTYR, AND ST. CYPRIAN, BISHOP, MARTYR

St. Cornelius was elected bishop of Rome after the death of Pope Fabian and governed for two years. They were turbulent years because of the controversy over the sacrament of Penance. The Novatian heretics on one side absolutely denied forgiveness to apostate christians. On the other side were Cornelius himself and the Roman clergy. Cornelius' friend, St. Cyprian of Cathage took a middle stand, insisting on rigorous penance on the part of the apostates. Through this controversy the Church came to a better understanding of the sacrament. St. Cornelius died in exile as a result of harsh treatment in the year 253.

When St. Cyprian of Carthage became a christian he gave all he had to the poor. Shortly after he was ordained priest in 248, and named bishop the following year. He proved to be a capable leader in times of persecution in North Africa. Cyprian's great literary work is entitled *The Unity of the Church*. It is the key to understanding his personality and everything else that he wrote. The immediate reason for writing it was to counteract the schism of Novatian in Rome and errors in North Africa for in his opinion schisms and heresies were more dangerous than persecutions.

For St. Cyprian, the Church was the only way to salvation. One of the most quoted sentences from this treatise is: "He cannot have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother." He questioned the validity of baptism by heretics and schismatics because he felt that no one can give what he does not possess. This particular issue involved him in a controversy with Cornelius' successor in Rome, St. Stephen.

The Church however, accepted the baptisms conferred by heretics as valid and that is the tradition that has been constant.

The point here is not the history of the controversies of the times of Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian, but their holiness. Cornelius was a respected bishop in Rome, and in Christendom

at the time. Cyprian was the acknowledged episcopal leader in North Africa, who wanted peace and unity in the Church. Though he fled persecution once, for reasons he thought valid, and history justifies him, he did die a martyr. He was beheaded in 258, the first African bishop to be martyred. At one time he wrote of martyrdom as a baptism 'richer in grace, more sublime in power, and more precious in its effects than that of water.'

We honor Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian for the reasons mentioned in our Opening Prayer. They have given us "an inspiring example of dedication to the pastoral ministry and constant witness to Christ in their suffering." Through their prayers we ask for "courage to work for the unity of [the] Church."

ST. ROBERT BELLARMINE, BISHOP, DOCTOR

Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) entered the Society of Jesus in 1560. Ten years later he was ordained a priest at the age of 28. His first task was as professor of theology at the University of Louvain, Belgium and later in Rome. He was recognized as a brilliant scholar and preacher. Later named Cardinal and Bishop, he was called by Pope Clement VIII to be papal theologian. As a writer he was an important apologist for the Church in the post-Tridentine era, the time of the Counter-Reformation.

He upheld the right of the pope to interfere in temporal affairs and he spoke out against the divine right of kings, which earned him some opposition. These are not burning theological issues of our time, but in the late 16th and early 17th centuries they had to be dealt with, and Robert Bellarmine was equal to the task. Scientists may remember that it was St. Robert Bellarmine who delivered the admonition to Galileo not to press the theory of Copernicus on the sun as center of the universe.

In his personal life he was an austere ascetic, and tried always to live as closely as possible like the poor of his day. To them he was always most kind and generous, sharing all that he had.

Thomas Jefferson in writing the Declaration of Independence incorporated the teaching of St. Robert Bellarmine on the inalienable rights of the person.

Robert Bellarmine lived in stormy times. The decades following the Council of Trent were charged with emotion. We learn from him that then as now there are matters that can change, but there was also lasting and permanent truths and realities that do not.

In the last years of his writing St. Robert turned to spiritual matters, commenting often on the scriptures and incorporating his reflections into his writings and preaching. Today we read from a treatise *On the Ascent of the Mind of God*, where he

comments on the great commandment, "You should love the Lord your God with all your heart:"

"Truly then the recompense is great for those who keep your commandments. The first and greatest commandment helps the man who obeys, not the God who commands. In addition, the other commandments of God perfect the man who obeys them. They provides him with what he needs. They instruct and enlighten him and make him good and blessed. . .

"May you consider truly good whatever leads to your goal and truly evil whatever makes you fall away from it. Prosperity and adversity, wealth and poverty, health and sickness, honors and humiliations, life and death, in the mind of the wise man, are not to be sought for their own sake, nor avoided for their own sake. But if they contribute to the glory of God and your eternal happiness, then they are good and should be sought. If they detract from this, they are evil and must be avoided." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Robert Bellarmine was canonized in 1930, and the following year declared a Doctor of the Church.

ST. JANUARIUS, BISHOP, MARTYR

Legend tells us that St. Januarius was a bishop. When persecution broke out in the area of Naples in the first years of the fourth century, Januarius went to visit some imprisoned christians. He was arrested, and very quickly condemned to be thrown to wild beasts. When beasts refused to touch him and his companions, they were beheaded.

Of interest today, although to most of us it may be a curiosity, is the phenomenon of the liquefaction of his blood several times a year, at the cathedral in Naples. There seems to be no logical or satisfying natural explanation. The phenomenon is not important for faith but does have significance. To the people of Naples it is an aid to devotion.

Martyrdom was a prized grace in the early centuries of the Church. It still is today, although it is not a frequent occurrence. For us, the annual commemoration of the heroic deaths of the martyrs is a way of praising God for the grace of their witness. Their feast days give us occasion to draw courage from their example, and a reminder to pray to God for perseverance and fidelity in times of trial and difficulty. The II Vatican Council says that the Church considers martyrdom the highest gift and supreme test of love.

ST. ANDREW KIM TAEGON,
PRIEST, MARTYR, AND
ST. PAUL CHONG HASANG AND
COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

Today we honor the nineteenth century Korean martyrs. There were one hundred and three of them who gave their lives between 1839 and 1867. The list included bishops, priests, but mostly laity, men and women, married and unmarried, children, young people and the elderly.

The faith had reached Korea at the beginning of the seventeenth century and flourished under lay leadership. The priests of the Paris Foreign Mission Society arrived in 1836, three years before persecution broke out. One of the leaders of the christian community was their first priest and pastor, Andrew Kim Taegon. Paul Chong Hasang was a lay leader. In the Office of readings today we read from the final exhortation of St. Andrew Kim Taegon:

"In this World of perils and hardship, if we did not recognize the Lord as our Creator, there would be no benefit either in being born or in our continued existence. We have come into this world by God's grace; by that same grace we have received baptism, entrance into the Church, and the honor of being called Christians. Yet what good will this do us if we are Christians in name alone and not in fact. . .

"For the last fifty or sixty years, ever since the coming of the Church to our land of Korea, the faithful have suffered persecution over and over again. Persecution still rages and as a result many who are friends in the household of the faith, myself among them, have been thrown into prison and like you are experiencing severe distress. . .

"God numbers the very hairs of our head and in his all embracing providence he has care over us all. Persecution, therefore, can only be regarded as the command of the

Lord or as a prize he gives or as a punishment he permits.

"I beg you not to fail in your love for one another, but to support one another and to stand fast until the Lord mercifully delivers us from our trials. . . I urge you to remain steadfast in faith, so that at last we will all reach heaven and there rejoice together. I embrace you all in love."

The opening prayer for this new celebration in our calendar is particularly beautiful:

"O God,
you have created all nations
and you are their salvation.
In the land of Korea
your call to the Catholic faith
formed a people of adoption,
whose growth you nurtured
by the blood of Andrew, Paul and their companions.
Through their martyrdom and their intercession
grant us strength
that we too may remain faithful to your commandments
even until death."

ST. MATTHEW, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

In the Gospel of Matthew, the name appears in the list of apostles, and is identified at his call as "a man named Matthew, sitting at his custom post" (*Matthew* 9:9). Later in the list he is called "Matthew the tax collector" (10:3). In the other synoptic gospels tradition identifies him with Levi (Cf. *Mark* 2:13; *Luke* 5:27).

Tradition credits him as the author of the gospel that bears his name, (though some believe that the text we now have is the work of a Jewish Christian from Antioch from around the year 90). Of his later life we know nothing. Tradition says he preached in Judea and later in Ethiopia where he was martyred.

The Gospel of Matthew has a unique point of view, namely, to show Jesus as the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament. In his introduction to this gospel in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, John L. McKenzie wrote:

"There are points of contact between Matthew and rabbinical writings that are not found in the other Gospels. These points of contact are more than an interest in the Law and allusions to Jewish institutions. Matthew sometimes moves in the world of rabbinical thought. He not only is familiar with rabbinical dialectic; he uses it." (p. 64).

Matthew wants to make the point for a Jewish audience that "Jesus Messiah is the new Moses and the new Israel, and the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets" (*ibid*). There are 41 references to the Old Testament in this gospel, and Fr. McKenzie points out that 37 of them are introduced with a formula, "the most common formula is 'that it might be fulfilled.' " (*ibid*).

Jesus is shown as a teacher who is superior to the rabbis. A long summary of the teaching of Jesus, is given as the Sermon on the Mount, which is kind of "catechism of Christian conduct." The miracles show Jesus as the messianic wonderworker. The kingdom of heaven (or of God) is presented as a present and also a future reality, and is identified with eternal life. Matthew's originality is in his explicit identification of the present kingdom with the Church: "I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock

I will build my church.” (16:18). Further on in the gospel Jesus instructs in the matter of fraternal correction: “If he refuses to listen to them (three witnesses), tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.” (18:17). Many of the parables, too, teach of the church as an existing society. (Cf. J.L. McKenzie’s article “Matthew, gospel of,” in *Dictionary of the Bible*, and his “Introduction” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* for more extended notes and commentary).

For a reflection today on the feast of St. Matthew there is a passage in a homily of St. Bede the Venerable, commenting on Matthew’s call and the banquet that he then gave for Jesus. We read:

“To see a deeper understanding of the great celebration Matthew held at his house, we must realize that he not only gave a banquet for the Lord at his earthly residence, but far more pleasing was the banquet set in his own heart which he provided through faith and love. Our Savior attests to this: *Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

“On hearing Christ’s voice, we open the door to receive him, as it were, when we freely assent to his promptings and when we give ourselves over to doing what must be done. Christ, since he dwells in the hearts of his chosen ones through the grace of his love, enters so that he might eat with us and we with him. He ever refreshes us by the light of his presence insofar as we progress in our devotion to and longing for the things of heaven. He himself is delighted by such a pleasing banquet.” (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Today we ask St. Matthew’s intercession to “help us to follow Christ and remain faithful in [God’s] service.” (Opening Prayer).

STS. COSMAS AND DAMIAN, MARTYRS

"In the glorious deeds of the holy martyrs who everywhere adorn the Church, we verify the truth of what we have been singing: *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.* They are precious in our sight and in the sight of him in whose name it was done" (Sermon 329, St. Augustine).

According to legend Sts. Cosmas and Damian were born in Arabia; they were twin brothers, both physicians who practiced their skills on behalf of all out of christian charity, accepting no fees. They are greatly honored in the Byzantine Churches and the veneration of these saints in Rome is attested to by the fact of their mention in the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I).

They were martyred in Cilicia, which is in Southeast Asia Minor which had one of the earliest christian communities. Tarsus, its principal city, was the birthplace of St. Paul. Joined with them in martyrdom were their three brothers, Anthimus, Euprepus and Leontius. The time of their death was the year 303.

"These holy men poured out their blood for the Lord; they loved Christ in life; they followed him in his death. They have won the glorious crown. They shared the one Spirit; they held fast to one faith" (Responsory to 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

In the prayer over the gifts at mass we pray:

"Lord,
we who celebrate the death of your holy martyrs
offer you the sacrifice
which gives all martyrdom its meaning.
Be pleased with our praise."

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

"You should never tread on the heels of Providence; but if Providence opens the way, you should run." These words of St. Vincent de Paul characterize this saint who "ran" with every opportunity to provide for the spiritual and material needs of the poor, and indeed, of all the people of his time. He was not so much an originator, but rather a great organizer.

From humble beginnings in the village of Pouy, in France, Vincent, at an early age displayed quick intelligence and a keen wit. As a teenager he felt called to ministry and in 1600 was ordained a priest. His work with the poor and his preaching attracted widespread attention, and his spiritual character was recognized by St. Francis de Sales who appointed him spiritual director to the Visitation Community that Francis founded together with St. Jane de Chantal.

In 1625 Vincent founded his own community, the Congregation of the Mission, which was devoted to working among the poor and for the formation of priests. And some eight years later (1633) together with St. Louise de Marillac, he founded the Sisters of Charity, whose main work was care of the sick and care of orphans and children in need.

Vincent was sensitive to the needs of the people and the difficulties of the Church in his time. He was able to provide for the needy through the charitable works that he established and met the challenges to the Church by the instructions that he gave. The spiritual formation of priests and the education of seminarians were priorities in his endeavors on behalf of all. He wanted his priests and religious to be as sensitive to all the needy as he himself was.

His personal spirituality is revealed in these words addressed to his priests: "Do the good that presents itself to be done. I do not say we should go out indiscriminately and take on everything, but rather those things God lets us know he wants of us. We belong to Him and not to ourselves. If He increases our work, He adds to our strength also."

To all his religious he wrote: "It is our duty to prefer the service of the poor to everything else and to offer such service as quickly as possible." Vincent was very practical in his approach to ministry to the poor and sick. "Offer the deed to God as your prayer. Do not become upset or feel guilty because you interrupted your prayer to serve the poor. God is not neglected if you leave him for such service. . . Charity is certainly greater than any rule. Moreover all rules must lead to charity."

From St. Vincent de Paul we learn courage in the face of difficulties, and absolute trust in the grace and power of God. In the opening prayer of the mass we acknowledge in Vincent "the courage and holiness of an apostle." Vincent was a model of zeal in ministry and he appreciated the power of prayer, the need for spiritual growth and the happiness that comes from doing the work of God, especially among the poor.

We pray: "God our Father. . . help us to be zealous in continuing his work." (Opening Prayer).

ST. LOUISE DE MARILLAC

Addendum to September 27 (St. Vincent de Paul)

Any sermon about St. Vincent de Paul is incomplete without some reference to St. Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), who was so closely related to Vincent in the founding of the Sisters of Charity. Vincent wrote of these sisters, "whose convent is the sickroom, whose chapel is the parish church, whose cloister is the streets of the city."

Louise wished to become a nun, but at age 21, on the advice of her confessor, she married instead. Twelve years later as a widow, she met St. Vincent de Paul and spent the rest of her life working with him. She became directress of the Sisters of Charity in their work of caring for the poor, the sick, and the neglected.

She was canonized in 1934, three hundred years after her first profession of religious vows. Pope John XXIII, in 1960, declared her patroness of social workers.

ST. LAWRENCE RUIZ AND COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

The martyrs whom we honor today in a marvelous way show the universality of the Church. These sixteen saints were from Europe and Asia, and in various circumstances spread the faith in the Philippines, Formosa and Japan.

St. Lawrence Ruiz was a husband and a father (and is the first Philippino to be canonized a saint). The others were priests, religious, laymen and women who also suffered martyrdom in Nagasaki, Japan in the seventeenth century. At their beatification in Manila in February 1981, during his visit to the Far East, John Paul II said they remind us that "to die for the faith is a gift granted to few, but to live for the faith is a call addressed to all."

The deaths of these martyrs occurred three and half centuries ago. There is meaning for us today, as Pope John Paul II said in the homily at the Canonization Mass (October 18, 1987): "Through the witness of their lives, generously offered for the love of Christ, the new saints speak to the entire Church today; they draw her on and stimulate her in her evangelical mission."

The decree of canonization reminds us that "through the example of their lives and their deaths these dauntless missionaries also sowed the seed for the future of the Church."

As we honor these martyrs we pray for the courage to live for the faith in response to our baptism. We are all called "to meet the challenges of the present with the same strength of character and trust in God" with which these martyrs "faced the supreme test of love." (Address of Pope John Paul II to a pilgrimage of Philippinos, Oct. 18, 1987).

ST. WENCESLAUS

Wenceslaus was born near Prague in the year 907, and was raised by his grandmother Ludmilla, a saintly lady. We read in the Second Lesson for the *Liturgy of the Hours* from an old Slavic legend:

“At the death of Vratisslaus the people of Bohemia made his son Wenceslaus their king. He was by God’s grace a man of utmost faith. He was charitable to the poor, and he would clothe the naked, feed the hungry and offer hospitality to travellers according to the summons of the Gospel. He would not allow widows to be treated unjustly; he loved all his people, both rich and poor; he also provided for the servants of God, and he adorned many churches.

His life and behavior were that of a model Christian ruler who promoted peace. Anti-Christian factions opposed him and his brother Boleslaus joined in their plotting against him. They instigated a violent attack on Wenceslaus one day when he was on his way to Mass. Wenceslaus died in the attack.

While his death was due to political jealousy and upheaval, he is honored as a martyr. He was 28 years old when murdered.

Pope Paul VI in *A Call to Action* wrote:

“While recognizing the autonomy of the reality of politics, Christians who are invited to take up political activity should try to make their choices consistent with the Gospel and, in the framework of a legitimate plurality, to give both personal and collective witness to the seriousness of their faith by effective and disinterested service of men.” (n. 46).

The Responsory to the Second Lesson in the *Liturgy of the Hours* from which we read states: “The just man shall blossom like the lily; he shall flourish for ever in the presence of the Lord.” May the prayers of St. Wenceslaus “free us from our self-seeking and help us to serve [God] with all our hearts.” (Opening Prayer).

MICHAEL, GABRIEL, RAPHAEL, ARCHANGELS

"Come let us worship the Lord in the company of his angels." (Invitatory). "Bless the Lord, all you his angels, mighty in power, you obey his word and heed the sound of his voice." (Entrance Antiphon).

"You should be aware that the word 'angel' denotes a function rather than a nature. Those holy spirits of heaven have indeed always been spirits. They can only be called angels when they deliver some message. Moreover, those who deliver messages of lesser importance are called angels; and those who proclaim messages of supreme importance are called archangels.

"Some angels are given proper names to denote the service they are empowered to perform. In that holy city. . . personal names are assigned to some, not because they could not be known without them, but rather to denote their ministry when they come among us. Thus, Michael means 'Who is like God?'; Gabriel is 'The Strength of God'; Raphael is 'God's Remedy' " (from a homily by St. Gregory the Great, 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Today we honor three archangels to whom proper names are given. As we just heard from St. Gregory, their names correspond to their missions. Michael is "the great prince, guardian of [God's] people." (Daniel 12:1). He is the heavenly spirit who watches over the Israelites. Michael is the one who enters into a dispute with the devil over the body of Moses. In the Apocalypse (12:7) he is the leader of the angelic hosts in the battle between the Dragon and his angels. In our liturgy Michael "is protector of the Church and the angel who escorts the souls of the departed into heaven."

Gabriel in the *Book of Daniel* is an interpreting angel (Cf. 8:16-26 and 9:21-27). In the Gospel of Luke he announces the birth of John the Baptist and announces to Mary the conception,

birth and mission of Jesus.

Raphael in the *Book of Tobit* is the guardian of a journey (Chapters 5 & 6); he is the healer of Tobit's blindness (11:1-15), and he is the expeller of demons (6:15-17 and 8:1-3) from Tobiah's marriage bed. (Note: for more complete references Cf. McKenzie, J.L., *Dictionary of the Bible*).

Our feast in honor of the archangels, and again in a few days our memorial of the guardian angels celebrate the providence and the goodness of God. The Preface of the Mass notes this:

"Father. . .

In praising your faithful angels and archangels,
we also praise your glory,
for in honoring them, we honor you, their Creator.
Their splendor shows us your greatness,
which surpasses in goodness the whole of creation."

ST. JEROME, PRIEST, DOCTOR

St. Jerome "holds pride of place" among the translators of the Bible. His translation, known as the Vulgate, is his greatest contribution to the Church.

Born in Stridon in Dalmatia (in present day Yugoslavia) about the year 347, he got his education in Rome and was baptised there. While in Trier, Germany, he took an interest in Eastern monasticism and travelled to the East. After a short time as an ascetic in the desert he was ordained a priest, sometime after the year 377. Jerome had become disenchanted and argumentative with the desert monks. Jerome's temper and readiness to quarrel were his lifelong problems.

He applied himself to learning Greek and Hebrew, which enabled him to undertake the task of translating the Bible. He was a commentator on the scriptures as well, and a prodigious writer of letters. St. Augustine said of him, exaggerating a bit, that "what Jerome is ignorant of, no mortal has ever known." His knowledge and ability were the result of prayer, penance and study, and his great work was done in a cave in Bethlehem.

For a short time he was secretary to Pope Damasus and while in Rome was spiritual guide to some noble ladies, notably St. Paula. He vigorously attacked error and heresy with his sarcasm and wit, although he often alienated even friends with his harsh, outspoken attitude. Eventually he returned to his cave in Bethlehem. Jerome lived one of the most active and exciting lives of the outstanding Christian scholars of his time. His letters are invaluable sources of history, recording the controversies of the age.

We have a description of him in *Saint of the Day*, (volume 2), edited by Leonard Foley, OFM:

"Jerome was a strong, outspoken man. He had the virtues and the unpleasant fruits of being a fearless critic and all the usual moral problems of a man. He was, as someone had said, no admirer of moderation whether in virtue or against

evil. He was swift to anger, but also swift to remorse, even more severe of his own shortcomings than on those of others." (p. 99-100).

St. Jerome's great delight was the study of the scriptures which the Opening Prayer acknowledges. He said: "To be ignorant of the scriptures is not to know Christ."

His convictions and his enthusiasm for Christian virtue are convincing. "To be a Christian is a great thing, not merely to seem one. And somehow or other those please the world most who please Christ least." "Christians are made not born."

St. Jerome continued his study of scripture and his life of penance until the end of his life. He died peacefully, literally worn out, "his sight and voice failing, his body like a shadow," on September 30, 420.

His greatest gifts to the Church are the translation of the Books of the Old and New Testaments into Latin, and his study of these Scriptures. We pray today that like St. Jerome we find in the Scriptures "the food of salvation and the fountain of life." (Opening Prayer).

ST. THERESA OF THE CHILD JESUS, VIRGIN

Therese Martin (1873-1897), in religious life, Theresa of the Child Jesus, is an endearing and captivating saint. Her autobiography is a spiritual masterpiece that has been the source of spiritual peace for so many who have come to understand her "little way." Her spiritual simplicity is described by the word 'love.' "O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my proper calling; my call is love."

In her autobiography we read:

"Since my longing for martyrdom was powerful and unsettling, I turned to the epistles of St. Paul in the hope of finding an answer. By chance the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of the first epistle to the Corinthians caught my attention, and in the first section I read that not everyone can be an apostle, prophet or teacher, that the Church is composed of a variety of members, and that the eye cannot be the hand. Even with such an answer revealed before me, I was not satisfied and did not find peace.

"I persevered in the reading and did not let my mind wander until I found this encouraging theme: *Set your desire on the great gifts. And I will now show you the way which surpasses all others.* For the Apostle insists that the greater gifts are nothing at all without love and that this same love is surely the best path leading directly to God. At length I had found peace of mind."

Her life in the Carmelite Convent in Lisieux was marked by humility, simplicity and trust in God. The story of how she entered at the young age of 15 is well known. She was a marvelous, saintly example to all in her convent, and offered her life "to save souls and to pray for priests."

Her own words tell her story better than anyone else can. It is an inspiring spiritual odyssey:

"Love appeared to me to be the hinge of my vocation. . . I

knew that the Church had a body composed of various members, but in this body the necessary and more noble member was not lacking; I knew that the Church had a heart and that such a heart appeared to be aflame with love. I knew that one love drove the members of the Church to action, that if this love were extinguished, the apostles would have proclaimed the Gospel no longer, the martyrs would have shed their blood no more. I saw and realized that love sets off the bounds of all vocations, that love is everything, that this same love embraces every time and every place. In one word, that love is everlasting.

"Then, nearly ecstatic with the supreme joy in my soul, I proclaimed: O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my calling; my call is love. Certainly I have found my proper place in the Church, and you gave me that very place, my God. In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love; and thus I will be all things, as my desire finds its direction."

Theresa's life in the Carmel lasted about nine years. Much of that time she was weak and ill. She died of tuberculosis on September 30, 1897, at the age of 24. She was canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1925, and declared Patroness of the Missions. Shortly before her death she wrote: "I want to spend my heaven doing good on earth."

In the Entrance Antiphon at Mass we read:

"The Lord nurtured and taught her; he guarded her as the apple of his eye. As the eagle spreads its wings to carry its young, he bore her on his shoulders. The Lord alone was her leader." (See Deuteronomy 32:10-12).

That is the tribute of the Church to St. Theresa of the Child Jesus. May we become like little children and follow her way, and like Theresa may we offer ourselves for the salvation of all mankind. (Cf. Opening Prayer and Prayer After Communion).

GUARDIAN ANGELS

"Bless the Lord all you angels of the Lord, sing his glory and praise forever." (Entrance Antiphon).

The texts of our Opening Prayer and Prayer After Communion tell what this feast is about. "God our Father in your loving providence you send your holy angels to watch over us." (Opening Prayer). "By the ministry of your angels lead us into the way of salvation and peace." (Prayer After Communion). This is a day of praise and thanks to God for his providence and goodness.

In Christian and Jewish belief. . . angels are spirits created by God before human beings to regulate the order of the world and serve as messengers. Their mission to human beings always has something to do with God's plan of salvation. In the Old Testament the messenger is often barely distinct from God, and appears in order to guide individuals or the entire chosen people. The personification always maintains the sovereignty of God, yet it is always understood that God is intervening in human affairs. The same is true of the angels' visits in the New Testament, in the dream of St. Joseph, the Annunciation to Mary, the angels who assist Christ after the temptations in the desert, the angels at the tomb.

Their division into classes was a medieval development, and really does not add anything to our appreciation of angels. Through them we understand the presence, knowledge and will of God for us, in the circumstances of our lives (Cf. "Angels," by Richard Woods, OP. in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Glazier, Inc. 1987).

Today's liturgy honors the angels as persons, pure spirits, messengers of God and it has been a traditional teaching that these spirits are our helpers. "Under their constant care," we are kept "free from danger in this life" and brought to "the joy of eternal life." (Cf. Prayer Over the Gifts).

In a sermon that is part of today's Office Readings St. Bernard tells us:

"So, let us be devoted and grateful to such great protectors; let us return their love and honor them as much as we can and should. Yet all our love and honor must go to [God], for it is from Him that they receive all that makes them worthy of our love and respect."

Whatever may be the nature of the spirits that surround God and carry out His designs, it is through their submission to Christ, the great mediator, that they serve the divine plan of creation and salvation. (*Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. X. Leon-Dufour, rev. ed., p. 16).

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

"Francis, a man of God, left his home and gave away his wealth to become poor and in need. But the Lord cared for him."
(Entrance Antiphon).

These words are from the Entrance Antiphon of today's Liturgy.

Francis (1181-1226) was born in Assisi to wealthy parents, and spent his youth in a carefree life. He went to war, and was taken prisoner in 1202. After his release he became ill, and shortly thereafter he had a vision of Christ that radically changed his life. He devoted himself to poverty and care of the sick, resolving "to reflect the image of Christ through a life of poverty and humility." (Opening Prayer).

He angered his father who disinherited him, and was considered to be a madman by family and friends. He was subjected to ridicule as he went about begging on behalf of the poor. Attracted by Francis's genuine concern for the needy, disciples followed after him, some of them influential people, and this led to the founding of the Franciscans in 1209.

Two years before he died Francis received the stigmata on the feast of the Finding of the True Cross, Sept. 14, 1224, while at prayer. This was the climax of extraordinary spiritual events experienced throughout his life. He died on October 3, 1226, and was canonized two years later.

The life and ideal of St. Francis have been romanticized, but Francis himself was always a realist. He experienced poverty and knew injustice. He personally suffered illness and pain, rejection and ridicule. Through it all he was an example of genuine joy and humility. He was outstanding in his apostolic zeal and love, especially to the poor and the sick. He was untiring in his efforts on their behalf, and left that as a legacy for us.

Francis would say to us today what he wrote in a letter to his followers:

“Let us also love our neighbors as ourselves. Let us have charity and humility. Let us give alms because these cleanse our souls from the stains of sin. . . We must not be wise according to the flesh. Rather we must be simple, humble and pure. We should never desire to be over others. Instead, we ought to be servants who are submissive to every human being for God’s sake. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on all who live in this way and persevere in it to the end. . . (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

We live in a depersonalized era. The attraction of and to St. Francis of Assisi is his personal warmth and sensitivity to people as individuals. Francis did not deal with people from afar; he wanted to touch them, not out of sentimentality, but out of genuine love.

In a sermon by Cardinal John Wright there is the following passage:

“Saint Francis did not love humanity as the modern sentimentalists pretend. *Humanity is an abstraction*. St. Francis loved that which most humanitarians and philanthropists have no time for. He loved the individual person: the next person he met, the person next to him — he didn’t care who it was — the next person to move into the neighborhood, whatever color he might be, whatever might be his background.

“He didn’t love humanity. How do you love humanity? You can’t shake hands with humanity, you can’t take humanity’s picture, you can’t send humanity a birthday card, you can’t ask humanity how is its headache, you can’t do anything at all for humanity. St. Francis never got trapped in this jargon about humanity. He only knew the person, and as many persons as there were and wherever they were, these he loved.” (Op. cit. pp. 118-119).

Let us walk in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi and imitate his joyful love and zeal. Let us share our gifts with each person we meet, in a spirit of simplicity and humility and do it with the sensitivity of St. Francis of Assisi.

OCTOBER 6

BLESSED MARIE ROSE DUROCHER, VIRGIN

She was born Eulalie Durocher, on October 6, 1811, and was the tenth and youngest child of her family. She took the name Marie Rose in the Congregation of religious women which she founded in Canada in 1843. The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary are a community dedicated to Christian education. She is also foundress of the first Canadian parish sodality for young women.

Marie Rose and her community struggled through great poverty and misunderstandings. She always had concern for the poor and needy. She died at the age of 38, on October 6, 1849, and was beatified by Pope John Paul II on May 23, 1982.

The Opening Prayer of the Mass speaks of Blessed Marie Rose as a "Flame of ardent charity." It notes her "great desire to collaborate as a teacher in the mission of the Church." Through her intercession we ask for the "same active love," so that we may respond to the needs of our day.

ST. BRUNO, PRIEST

Born in Cologne, Germany in 1030 St. Bruno became a priest, and later professor of theology at Rheims. He was head of the school and chancellor of the diocese. He supported Pope Gregory VII in his efforts to reform the clergy, and experienced personal harassment and difficulties because of it. He had for a long time desired a life of solitude and seized the opportunity to retire from public life. He also persuaded some friends to join him in a rather bleak desert area near Grenoble, Spain, the area of Chartreuse. There they built an oratory and some small hermitages, and this foundation became the Order of Carthusians.

Their ideal was a life of solitary prayer, with some communal prayer daily, and an occasional meal together on feast days. Later, Bruno was called to Rome by Pope Urban II, a former pupil, to give him counsel in governing the Church. Bruno was able to turn down honors and an archbishopric, and prevailed upon the pope to allow him to return to his solitude. There he continued to guide his monks, to pray and to study.

To the monks he wrote:

“Rejoice, my dearest brothers, because you are so blessed and because of the bountiful hand of God’s grace upon you. Rejoice because you have escaped the various dangers and shipwrecks of the stormy world. Rejoice because you have reached the quiet and safe anchorage of a secret harbor. . .

“Let us rejoice that since you are unacquainted with the knowledge of letters, almighty God will inscribe in your hearts with His finger not only His love but also the knowledge of His holy law. (From a letter; 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

What is the appeal of monasticism? In an article in *Our Sunday Visitor* Father Clifford Stevens wrote: “Monasticism, in its classic expression, creates an environment for intimacy with God. . . It is

geared essentially to the eternal." As such it will always be out of step with the world at any given time. It has existed in the past but it will not be a relic in the future either.

The same Father Clifford continues: "The monastic life begins with a fascination with God. The monk seeks a place where he can have the *time*, the *freedom*, the *opportunity* and the *resources* to nourish that Divine fascination. In its basic reality there is no other explanation for monastic life. Preoccupation with God is the very substance of the monastic lifestyle."

As such it is not unique to Christianity; we know of it in other religious traditions as well. So it addresses a need that all of us have at one time or another.

"There is a contemplative dimension to everyone's personality, and most people, at some time in their life, feel drawn to solitude. For most, it is a momentary need, a return to their roots, the seeking of a calm haven where they can gather their strength and take stock of their courage. Some flee to it in their desperate hours, emerging fresher and stronger and regenerated for the tasks ahead." (Fr. Clifford Stevens, *Op. cit.*).

Moments and times of prayerful solitude are spiritually helpful to all of us. They can help us remain faithful as we struggle amid daily problems and changes. They strengthen us to face the challenges around us in the Church and in society.

St. Bruno died on October 6, 1101 and is revered throughout the Church.

ST. DENIS, BISHOP, MARTYR, AND COMPANIONS MARTYRS

"Through martyrdom the Church's holiness, instead of remaining purely subjective, achieves by God's grace the visible expression it needs." (Karl Rahner).

St. Denis is the apostle and patron of France. With six other bishops he was sent to Gaul in the year 250 as missionaries. Tradition tells us that he preached in the area of Paris, and he is honored as its first bishop. He was martyred near the city together with St. Rusticus, priest, and St. Eleutherius, a deacon, about the year 258.

Martyrdom is a privileged and unique grace, and many who longed for it were not granted it. But many have found holiness in the daily struggle for fidelity to Christ and his gospel.

In a commentary by St. Ambrose we read today:

"As there are many kinds of persecution, so there are many kinds of martyrdom. Every day you are a witness to Christ."

St. Ambrose goes on to list the many temptations that the Christian faces in every day life, temptations against purity the temptation to avarice, the temptation to pride. He then asks:

"Who can give greater witness than one *who acknowledges that the Lord Jesus has come in the flesh* and keeps the commandments of the Gospel?

"How many hidden martyrs there are, bearing witness to Christ each day and acknowledging Jesus as Lord!. . . Be faithful and courageous when you are persecuted within, so that you may win approval when you are persecuted in public." (Commentary on Psalm 118).

St. Denis and his companion martyrs were strong and steadfast in their sufferings for Christ. Let their example strengthen us to bear the daily trials of life. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. JOHN LEONARDI, PRIEST

After ordination to the priesthood, John Leonardi (1541-1609) gathered a group of laymen to assist him in the care of the sick and to work for the spiritual good of prisoners. Motivated by the reforms of the Council of Trent he founded a society of diocesan priests in 1574 to carry out the mandated renewal of the council. The young men who had been assisting him all became priests. The society was later approved as the Clerics Regular of the Mother of God.

St. John Leonardi was also a preacher of renewal and promoted the religious instruction of the young. In a letter to Pope Paul V he wrote: "Nothing should be left untried that can train children from early childhood in good morals and in the earnest practice of Christianity. To this end nothing is more effective than pious instructions in Christian doctrine. Children should be entrusted only to good and God-fearing teachers."

He associated also the founding of a society of priests dedicated to working in foreign missions, which later became the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. St. John Leonardi was also requested by Pope Clement VIII to assist in the renewal and reform of several religious communities.

His letter to Pope Paul V expresses a desire for genuine reform and spiritual renewal in the Church. He wrote that:

"Reform must begin with high and low alike, with superiors and inferiors. Yet the reformers must look first to those who are set over the rest, so that reform can begin at the point from which it may spread to others."

He then boldly says that it must begin "with cardinals, patriarchs, archbishops, bishops and priests" who have a particular responsibility to be guides.

"Those who want to work for moral reform in the world must seek the glory of God before all else. Because he is the source of all good, they must wait for his help, and pray for it in this difficult and necessary undertaking. They must

then present themselves to those they seek to reform, as mirrors of every virtue and as lamps on a lampstand. Their upright lives and noble conduct must shine before all those who are in the house of God. In this way they will gently entice the members of the Church to reform instead of forcing them, lest, in the words of the Council of Trent, they demand of the body what is not found in the head, and thus upset the whole order of the Lord's household." (Letter to Pope Paul V).

The Church has always known the truth of the remark made by George Bernard Shaw: "The best reformers the world has ever seen are those who commence on themselves." It is an on-going need in the Church and God has always raised up prophets in time of need. Today we honor St. John Leonardi as one of those prophets.

St. John Leonardi died in 1609 in Rome after contracting the plague from those to whom he ministered and he was canonized in 1938.

ST. CALLISTUS I, POPE, MARTYR

The life and career of St. Callistus I is an interesting story with no dull moments. A slave, he was entrusted with business responsibilities by his Christian owner. When the business failed, Callistus fled, but was brought back and sent to work on a treadmill. After he was released, he was arrested in a brawl in a synagogue and sent to work in the mines. After he was freed, he made his way back to Rome. Pope St. Zephyrinus, knowing his administrative skills, ordained him a deacon and later he was elected to succeed Zephyrinus.

The priest Hippolytus refused to recognize his election, had himself elected and consecrated bishop, and was thus the first anti-pope. This schism was resolved some 18 years later when Hippolytus was reconciled by Pope St. Pontian while both were in exile. Later, Hippolytus was martyred and honored as a saint.

At any rate, Callistus' five years as bishop of Rome were as stormy as his earlier life. He took a moderate stance in some doctrinal disputes and advocated leniency in some disciplinary matters. In each instance he was opposed by the rigorous stand of Hippolytus and his followers. Callistus maintained that the Church was a home for sinners as well as saints, and therefore offered reconciliation to those who had fallen into any sin after baptism. His view became the norm in the discipline of Penance in the Church.

St. Callistus I died in a local disturbance in the year 222 A.D. Whether he is a true martyr is disputed, since there was no persecution at the time, but he was honored as a martyr in the earliest martyrology.

A thought for today, from a treatise by St. Cyprian of Carthage:

"If persecution should overtake. . . a soldier of God, it will not overcome one so virtuously prepared for battle. Even if our summons should come sooner, our faith which was prepared for the witness of martyrdom will not go

unrewarded. For we would immediately receive our reward by God's judgement. In time of persecution the battle wins the crown, but in peace it is the testimony of a good conscience."

From our history we do not know the interior spirituality of St. Callistus I, but he was a capable bishop and his actions as bishop show an understanding of the charity and gentleness of Christ. (Note: for a more detailed yet brief account of the life and papacy of Callistus I, see J.N.D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*).

ST. TERESA OF JESUS, VIRGIN, DOCTOR

St. Teresa of Jesus (of Avila) (1515-1582) is one of the most down to earth mystics that the Church has ever known. She was described as "intelligent, hardheaded, charming, and deeply spiritual." Another described her as "talented, outgoing, affectionate, courageous, . . . totally human. She is wise, yet practical; intelligent, yet much in tune with her experience; mystical, yet an energetic reformer. The mark she left on the Church and the world, is threefold: she was a woman; she was a contemplative; she was an active reformer." (*Saint of the Day*, ed. by Leonard Foley, v. 2, pp114-115).

Born at Avila on March 28, 1515, Teresa was later educated by Augustinian nuns. She had to leave that convent because of illness. In 1536 she entered the Carmelite Convent at Avila, left two years later because of illness and returned in 1540. Her mystical experiences began fifteen years later. It was only after much anguish and the assurances of St. Peter of Alcantara that she became convinced of the authenticity of her experiences. In 1562 she founded her first convent of reformed Carmelites. These were nuns who wished a more cloistered and contemplative observance rather than the relaxed discipline of her time. She went on to found sixteen more, travelling throughout Spain. At the time she founded her second convent she met a young Carmelite, John of the Cross, and through him founded her first monastery for men.

Her years of reform and renewal were turbulent years of struggle, but Teresa was equal to the task.

Teresa's letters and writings are spiritual classics, including her autobiography. (Other major writings are *The Way of Perfection*, 1573; *The Interior Castle*, 1577). If you want proof that a mystic can be practical, read St. Teresa. For her, action must be nourished by prayer and contemplation in union with the redeeming Christ. She taught that mental prayer is the best means of making oneself available and useful to the Church and

to all in the Church. This is reflected in these words from a short treatise entitled *The Book of Life*:

“Whenever we think of Christ we should recall the love that led him to bestow on us so many graces and favors, and also the great love God showed in giving us in Christ a pledge of his love; for love calls for love in return. Let us strive to keep this always before our eyes and to rouse ourselves to love him. For if at some time the Lord should grant us the grace of impressing his love on our hearts, all will become easy for us and we shall accomplish great things quickly and without effort.”

St. Teresa of Jesus is one of the greatest mystics of the Church, and it was a glorious day in 1970 when she was declared a Doctor of the Church. It was an official and public recognition of something that the Church long knew, that God by his Spirit “raised up St. Teresa of Jesus to show [his] Church the way to perfection.” So we pray that “her inspired teaching awaken in us a longing for true holiness.” (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. HEDWIG, RELIGIOUS

Born in Bavaria in 1174, Hedwig was married at the age of 12 to Duke Henry of Silesia, by whom she had seven children. Through her efforts monasteries and hospitals for the poor were built. She was also a peacemaker, keeping peace between her quarrelling sons.

After the death of her husband she retired to a monastery for women that she had built at Trebnitz. She did not formally join the community, but observed religious practices and spiritual exercises. She preferred to maintain the administration of her property and goods in order to assist the poor. She died in 1243.

St. Hedwig is remembered for her humility and goodness to the needy. A contemporary author wrote of her:

"Just as her devotion made her always seek after God, so her generous piety turned her toward her neighbor and she bountifully bestowed alms on the needy. She gave aid to . . . widows and orphans, to the weak and feeble, to lepers and those bound in chains or imprisoned, to travelers and needy women nursing infants. She allowed no one who came to her for help to go away uncomforted.

"And because this servant of God never neglected the practice of all good works, God also conferred on her such grace that when she lacked human means to do good, and her own powers failed, the divine power of the sufferings of Christ strengthened her to respond to the needs of her neighbors. And so through divine favor she had the power to relieve the bodily and spiritual troubles of all who sought her help." (Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

St. Hedwig exemplifies the virtues of the caring Church in the tradition of God's prophets throughout salvation history.

ST. MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE, VIRGIN

St. Margaret Mary (1647-1690) entered the convent of the Sisters of the Visitation at Paray-le-Monial at the age of 24. She was noted for her humility and simplicity, as well as her kindness and patience in the face of hostility and criticism.

Even prior to her entrance into religious life she had experienced visions of Christ. On December 27, 1674, three years after entering the Visitation convent she received her first revelations from the Sacred Heart. These revelations continued for thirteen months. Margaret Mary had to cope with much opposition and skepticism from her community and from theologians. Blessed Claude de la Columbiere, a Jesuit, became her confessor for a period of one year, and convinced her of the genuineness of the revelations. He encouraged her to persevere in her efforts to bring to fruition what the Sacred Heart asked of her.

In her lifetime she saw the requests honored: more frequent, even daily Holy Communion, the observance of the First Friday and the institution of a feast of the Sacred Heart. These came about first in the Visitation Community and were extended to the whole Church by Pope Clement XIII in 1765, 75 years after her death. She with St. John Eudes and Bl. Claude de la Columbiere are known as the "saints of the Sacred Heart."

St. Margaret Mary described well the nature of the devotion to the Sacred Heart in a letter:

"It seems to me that our Lord's earnest desire to have his Sacred Heart honored in a special way is directed toward renewing the effects of redemption in our souls. For the Sacred Heart is an inexhaustible fountain and its sole desire is to pour itself out into the hearts of the humble so as to free them and prepare them to lead lives according to his good pleasure.

"From this divine heart three streams flow endlessly. The first is the stream of mercy for sinners; it pours into their

hearts sentiments of contrition and repentance. The second is the stream of charity which helps all in need and especially aids those seeking perfection to find the means of surmounting their difficulties. From the third stream flows love and light for the benefit of his friends who have attained perfection; these he wishes to unite to himself so that they may share his knowledge and commandments and, in their individual ways, devote themselves wholly to advancing his glory.

“This divine heart is an abyss of all blessings, and into it the poor should always submerge all their needs. It is an abyss of joy in which all of us can immerse our sorrows. It is an abyss of lowliness to counteract our foolishness, an abyss of mercy for the wretched, an abyss of love to meet our every need.”

Through the intercession of St. Margaret Mary “may we come to know the love of Christ, which surpasses all human understanding, and be filled with the fullness of God.” (Opening Prayer).

ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, BISHOP, MARTYR

Ignatius is well known for his seven letters which he wrote on his journey from Antioch to Rome where he was martyred. This venerable bishop, successor of St. Peter in Antioch, is an endearing figure of the first century of Christianity.

His letters were addressed to various Christian communities along the way, where he stopped on his journey to preach to all Christians of all times and places.

"Jesus Christ is our only teacher" (To the Magnesians); "He is really of the line of David. . .and the Son of God by the will and power of God; was really born of a Virgin" (To the Smyrnians).

The Church is "the place of sacrifice;" the Eucharist is "the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death, and everlasting life in Jesus Christ" (To the Ephesians). He admonishes:

"Take care, then, to partake of one Eucharist, for one is the Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one the cup to unite us with His Blood, and one altar, just as there is one bishop assisted by the presbytery and the deacons, my fellow servants" (To the Philadelphians). "The Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins, and whom the Father in His loving-kindness raised from the dead" (To the Smyrnians).

His letter to the Roman community, sent on ahead, gives evidence of the great respect that he held for this community founded by Peter and Paul. It is the first avowal of a primacy of Rome, and he salutes this church as "a church worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of felicitation, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and presiding in love, maintaining the law of Christ, and bearer of the Father's name." In this letter he appeals to the Roman community not to intervene on his behalf and thus deprive him of the grace of martyrdom:

"I am not yet perfected in Jesus Christ. . .May nothing seen

or unseen fascinate me, so that I may happily make my way to Jesus Christ. Fire, cross, struggles with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crunching of my whole body, cruel torments inflicted by the devil, let them come upon me, provided only I make my way to Jesus Christ. . Beware of seducing me with matters; suffer me to receive pure light. . Permit me to be an imitator of my suffering God."

"Pray for me that I may obtain my desire. I have not written to you as a mere man would, but as one who knows the mind of God. If I am condemned to suffer, I will take it that you wish me well. If my case is postponed, I can only think that you wish me harm. . I plead with you: show me no untimely kindness. Let me be food for the wild beasts, for they are my way to God. I am God's wheat and shall be ground by their teeth so that I may become Christ's pure bread. Pray to Christ for me that the animals will be the means of making me a sacrificial victim for God."

The wish of Ignatius was fulfilled. He was cast to wild lions in the Roman Amphitheater and died a martyr's death in 107 A.D.

ST. LUKE

The Opening Prayer of our Mass on this feast of St. Luke tells us what we will find in his writing on the life and ministry of Jesus. We will learn of Jesus' love for the poor; we will be taught the unity "in one heart and spirit" that should be the mark of christians; we will understand that Jesus came for the salvation of all nations.

In comparison with the other synoptic gospels, those of Matthew and Mark, we discover that Luke's writing is more spiritual. He has a high ideal of the christian life. More often than the others he speaks or writes of prayer, its necessity, its value, and its qualities.

In recounting the miracles of Jesus, Luke is very sensitive to the feelings of the beneficiaries of these marvellous graces. We learn of the graciousness of Jesus as well, of the goodness of Jesus. The gospel tells us that Jesus wanted to prepare the townspeople of the places he intended to visit, so he sent his disciples on ahead to announce his coming. In a way Jesus was preparing his disciples and educating them in a style of ministry. They were learning how to conduct themselves when the time came to be in the place of Jesus and further His mission to the nations.

From the writing of Luke we understand that the apostles and disciples were learners, conscious of the role they would later play. They sensed in Jesus a strength of character and probably were in awe of him. They learned love for the poor and those in need of encouragement and the unity that should make them followers of Jesus.

We know who Jesus is, and by our daily lives we witness to Him and to the love of God that he taught. In whatever way we can we act as his disciples today and prepare for his coming to others. All of us are supported by the grace of Jesus to be caring toward those in need, sensitive and gracious, virtuous in all that we say and do. In this way we continue the mission of Jesus Christ, and are able to announce that "the reign of God is at hand."



STS. ISAAC JOGUES, JOHN DE BREBEUF, PRIESTS, MARTYRS AND COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

(The North American Martyrs)

When he was seventeen Isaac Jogues expressed a desire to be a missionary. After his ordination he was told: "You will go to the New France to die." In 1647 he was murdered near Albany, New York.

John de Brebeuf expressed his desire for martyrdom in his diary: "I have experienced a great desire to be a martyr and to endure all the torments the martyrs suffered." In 1649 he was martyred near Georgian Bay, Canada.

Among the other six were Rene Goupil who had entered the Jesuits but had to leave because of illness and became a surgeon; and John Lalande, who was also a layman. Rene Goupil was martyred in 1642, Lalande was martyred the day after Isaac Jogues in 1647. The remaining four were Jesuit priests: Anthony Daniel, Gabriel Lalement, Charles Garnier and Noel Chabanel who were martyred in 1649.

All were subjected to cruel tortures by the Iroquois, and many of their Huron converts were mangled and killed along with them.

A lesson at Matins in the former Breviary calls these martyrs "men of outstanding integrity, who sacrificed their lives. . . They were valiant men, fired with apostolic zeal, living most mortified lives in intimate prayerful union with God."

The blood of these martyrs has "consecrated the first beginnings of the faith in North America." We pray that by their help and prayers our Church may grow stronger especially here in our North American countries. Let the blood of these martyrs be the seed that will continue to bear fruit in our day.

ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS, PRIEST

"It is very good and holy to consider the passion of our Lord and to meditate on it, for by this sacred path we reach union with God" from a letter by St. Paul of the Cross).

Paul Francis Danei (1694-1775) began to practice austerities as a teenager. At age 20 he entered military service for one year to fight against the Turks, and after being discharged he resumed his prayer and penance. In the year 1702 he had a vision of Our Lady in a black habit, and understood that he was to found a religious community. After some difficulty he and his brother John received papal approval and were ordained priests. The original rule of the Passionists was modified after they realized it was too austere.

This new congregation was dedicated to the work of preaching parish missions to effect the spiritual renewal envisioned by the Council of Trent. Paul of the Cross, his religious name, became one of the most renowned preachers of his time. His Order received final papal approval in 1769 and two years later he founded the Passionist Nuns. He died on October 18, 1775, at Rome.

His preaching was centered on the Crucified Christ. "Live in such a way that all may know that you bear outwardly as well as inwardly the image of Christ crucified, the model of all gentleness and mercy." That theme ran through all of his preaching and ministry to the people.

Paul of the Cross emphasized the primacy of love.

"Love is a unifying virtue which takes upon itself the torments of its beloved Lord. It is a fire reaching through to the inmost soul. It transforms the lover into the one loved. More deeply, love intermingles with grief, and grief with love, and a certain blending of love and grief occurs. They become so united that we can no longer distinguish love from grief nor grief from love. Thus the loving heart rejoices in its sorrow and exults in its grieving love.

“Therefore, be constant in practicing every virtue, and especially in imitating the patience of our dear Jesus, for this is the summit of pure love” (from a letter).

All of his audiences were told: “Conceal yourselves in Jesus crucified, and hope for nothing except that all men be thoroughly converted to his will . . .”

Through his special love of the Cross, St. Paul of the Cross inspires us “to embrace our own cross with courage” (Opening Prayer).

ST. JOHN OF CAPISTRANO, PRIEST

John of Capistrano was born in 1386. He was well educated in law, talented and successful, was appointed governor of Perugia, and was married. He was imprisoned during a local war and during that time resolved to change his life. He received a dispensation that permitted him to enter the Franciscans, and four years later, in 1420, he was ordained a priest.

John devoted his ministry to preaching and brought many to conversion during a time of confusion and apathy throughout Europe. John was also instrumental in the reform of the Franciscans in conjunction with St. Bernadine of Siena. Later he helped St. Colette in renewing the Poor Clare nuns.

His preaching, though, was his greatest gift. His last years were spent preaching in Hungary but, he died at Villach, Austria, a victim of the plague, on October 23, 1456. He is buried there and on his tombstone is inscribed:

"This tomb holds John, by birth of Capistrano, a man worthy of all praise, defender and promoter of faith, guardian of the Church, zealous protector of his Order, an ornament to all the world, lover of truth and justice, mirror of life, surest guide in doctrine; praised by countless tongues, he reigns blessed in heaven" (Quoted in *Saint of the Day*, v. 2, pp130-131).

The ardor and idealism of St. John of Capistrano shines forth in his writing, as in his preaching. From his treatise, *Mirror of the Clergy*, we read in the Office of Readings:

"Those who are called to the table of the Lord must glow with the brightness that comes from the good example of a praiseworthy and blameless life. They must completely remove from their lives the filth and uncleanness of vice. Their upright lives must make them like the salt of the earth for themselves and for the rest of mankind. The brightness of their wisdom must make them like the light of the world that brings light to others. They must learn from their

eminent teacher, Jesus Christ. . .By the brightness of their holiness they must bring light and serenity to all who gaze upon them. They have been placed here to care for others. Their own lives should be an example to others, showing how they must live in the house of the Lord."

ST. ANTHONY CLARET, BISHOP

Born in Spain, Anthony Maria Claret (1807-1870) is remembered primarily as a missionary and a preacher. He was also a prolific writer and a social reformer.

Ordained a priest in 1835, he dedicated the next ten years to preaching retreats and missions in Spain. In 1849 he founded the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary — the Claretians, to continue his missionary endeavors, preaching and writing. The following year he was appointed Archbishop of Santiago, Cuba, where his efforts to bring about needed disciplinary reforms were bitterly opposed. At one point an attempt was made on his life. Recalled to Spain in 1857 he devoted his energies to his missionary congregation and was spiritual advisor and confessor to Queen Isabella II. Together with the court he was forced to flee during the revolution of 1868, and he died in exile in France in 1870, shortly after the First Vatican Council.

From his writings we read today:

“The love of Christ arouses us, urges us to run, and to fly, lifted on the wings of holy zeal. The man who truly loves God also loves his neighbor. The truly zealous man is also one who loves, but he stands on a higher plane of love so that the more he is inflamed by love, the more urgently zeal drives him on. . . The zealous man desires and achieves all great things and he labors strenuously so that God may always be better known, loved and served in this world and in the life to come, for this holy love is without end”
(2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

We pray that we might imitate St. Anthony Claret's love and patience, and his zeal for the preaching of the Gospel as we all work for the growth of God's kingdom.



STS. SIMON AND JUDE, APOSTLES

Of St. Simon, called "the Cananean" (Mt. 10:4, Mk. 3:18) or "the Zealot" (Lk. 6:15; Acts 1:13) we know nothing other than his name which we find in all four lists of the Apostles.

St. Jude is also named in the four lists as Thaddeus (My. 10:3; Mk. 3:18) or Judas, son of James (Lk 6:16, Acts 1:13). He is probably not the author of the Epistle or Letter of Jude which is attributed to Jude, the kinsman of the Lord, who is mentioned in Mt. 13:55 and Mk. 6:3. (In English we often shorten the name of Jude to distinguish St. Jude from Judas Iscariot, the traitor.)

Western tradition has it that Simon preached in Egypt, Jude in Mesopotamia, and then the two joined together in Persia where they were martyred. The legend which we find in Lesson IV in the former Breviary is that

"Together in those far-reaching countries by their teaching and their miracles, they spread the faith. Finally by a glorious martyrdom they paid together their testimony of honor to the most holy name of Jesus."

We still feel today a sense of loss or incompleteness in not knowing more about these men who were closely associated with Jesus in his ministry. Perhaps there is a reason for this, and we are able, therefore, to focus our attention on the truth that the building up of the Church is the work of God, not of men. Yet the vocation of apostle of Jesus, the call to be one of the twelve is a privileged grace. This is explained by St. Cyril of Jerusalem in a commentary on the Gospel of John:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed certain men to be guides and teachers of the world and stewards of his divine mysteries. Now he bids them to shine out like lamps and to cast out their light not only over the land of the Jews but over every other country under the sun and over people scattered in all directions and settled in distant lands.

"That man has spoken truly who said: *No one takes this honor upon himself, except the one who is called by God, for it*

was our Lord Jesus Christ who called his own disciples before all others to a most glorious apostolate. These holy men became the *pillar and mainstay of the truth*, and Jesus said that he was sending them just as the Father had sent him” (Cf. 2nd reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

Through the intercession of the apostles Simon and Jude we ask: “Father. . .give your Church continued growth and increase the number of those who believe in you.” (Opening Prayer).

ALL SAINTS

"Let us rejoice in the Lord and keep a festival in honor of all the saints." (Entrance Antiphon).

This solemnity in honor of all the saints, demonstrates the great honor and respect that we render to holy men and women of the past. Honoring the saints reminds us of our goal of attaining heaven as a reward for our efforts in living the Gospel taught to us by Jesus.

The Preface of the Mass tells us what this feast is all about:

"Around your throne
the saints, our brothers and sisters,
sing your praise forever.
Their glory fills us with joy,
and their communion with us in your church
gives us inspiration and strength
as we hasten on our pilgrimage of faith. . ."

In our prayers we ask that their example of holy living turn our "thoughts to the service of God and neighbor" (Opening Prayer), and we express our appreciation of "their concern to help and save us" (Prayer Over the Gifts).

The saints are examples of the life that is lived in the spirit of the Gospels. This spirit is that of the Beatitudes as proclaimed in the Gospel reading today (Cf. *Matthew 5:1-12*). These spiritual principles summarize how to live a meaningful Christian life.

Each of us can look to our patron saints and to those saints for whom we have some special admiration for inspiration and example. These saints are our brothers and sisters, who are in a very real communion with us, and who can strengthen us by their intercessions, since we are on the same journey which they have completed.

Their triumph is a source of our joy; their glory is our eager expectation.

The solemnity celebrates God's great triumph in the

multitude which no one can count. It celebrates God's glory, wisdom, honor and power. This feast is also the community's day to praise God who began a great work in us on the day of our baptism, when we were washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. We pray today that with God's help and the intercession of the saints, we will bring to completion the great work He has begun in us, and that we will arrive at God's throne to sing His praise forever.

ALL SOULS

The practice of keeping a memorial day for the dead did not begin with Christianity; such a commemoration was prevalent in pagan antiquity. But as early as the second century Christians commemorated the anniversary of the dead, especially the day of death of the martyrs. The liturgical observance of a single day for the dead dates to the seventh century and it is known that St. Isidore of Seville encouraged it. The monks of Cluny set the date as November 2, the day following the feast of All Saints, and in the fourteenth century Rome accepted this practice. The custom of offering three masses on this day began in Spain in the fifteenth century. It was Pope Benedict XV who extended this privilege to the entire Church.

The tone of today's celebration is a paschal one, because Christ's paschal mystery gives meaning to the death of the faithful Christian.

The Entrance Antiphon for the first of three sets of prayers for the Masses for this day quotes two verses from the letters of St. Paul:

"Just as Jesus died and rose again, so will the Father bring with him those who have died in Jesus. Just as in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be made alive (*I Thess. 4:14; I Cor. 15:22*).

Belief in the resurrection of Jesus, and belief in our own resurrection should convince us to take life seriously. Death is not something that we as Christians face with fear; it is not a threat to existence. If we understand it as the necessary prelude to resurrection, then it will help us to determine how to live. We will then look upon our time in the mortal life as a series of opportunities for believing, hoping, loving, and growing. All moments are unique and will not be repeated.

Our destiny, has been designed by the same Father who raised up Jesus from death. He wants us to join his Son in glory where we will live with more intensity than ever before, and forever.

Like yesterday's feast of All Saints, it is a feast of God's triumph. It is a celebration of the victory of Jesus over death, and "a promise that we will one day enjoy the vision of God's glory in the kingdom where hope is firm for all who love and rest is sure for all who serve." (Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, in *Scripture in Church*, v. 15, n. 60, p. 403; this sermon is drawn to a great extent from the text).

Perhaps today we will be more conscious of the communion of saints as we pray for our departed loved ones. Today's feast gives us an added dimension to our prayers for them; when we pray for them we experience this communion of help and of companionship. We can be aware, too, that we are also making our way to fulness of life and happiness in Jesus. That life is the gift that he has won for us all.

On this day may the God of all consolation "bless us with faith in the resurrection of his Son, and with the hope of rising to new life. To us who are alive may he grant forgiveness, and to all who have died a place of light and peace." (Cf. Solemn Blessing).

ST. MARTIN DE PORRES, RELIGIOUS

What we already know of St. Martin de Porres (1574-1639) has been said beautifully and well by Pope John XXIII. His words were spoken at the canonization of this humble and prayerful Dominican lay-brother, on May 6, 1962:

"He did not blame others for their shortcomings. Certain that he deserved more severe punishment for his sins than others did, he would overlook their worst offenses. He was tireless in his efforts to reform the criminal, and would sit up with the sick to bring them comfort. For the poor he would provide food, clothing and medicine. He did all he could to care for poor farmhands, blacks and mulattoes who were looked down upon as slaves, the dregs of society in their time. Common people responded by calling him 'Martin the charitable.' "

The social and spiritual ills addressed by St. Martin de Porres still afflict the world today: social and racial injustices, discrimination, neglect of the poor. Governments have not shown the ability to realistically assist the needy. Bogged down by bureaucracy, governments are often without human warmth and genuine caring. Only dedicated servants of God seem capable of genuinely acting with the sensitivity and considerateness of Jesus Christ. In this way they identify with the harsh realities of poverty and injustice. The history of prophets and saints teaches this lesson again and again.

The Church is aware of these same needs in our time:

"You hear rising up more pressing than ever, from their personal distress and collective misery, 'the cry of the poor.' Was it not in order to respond to their appeal as God's privileged ones that Christ came, even going so far as to identify himself with them." (*Evangelica testificatio*, June 29, 1971, n. 17).

The II Vatican Council in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world* also stated:

“All men are endowed with a rational soul and are created in God’s image. . .their equal dignity as persons demands that we strive for fairer and more humane conditions. Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of one human race is a source of scandal and militates against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace. (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 29).

This commemoration in honor of St. Martin de Porres reminds us that the example of his life “is ample evidence that we can strive for holiness and salvation as Christ Jesus has shown us: first, by loving God with all your heart, *with all your soul, and with all your mind*; and second, *by loving your neighbor as yourself*.” (Pope John XXIII, canonization homily).

ST. CHARLES BORROMEEO, BISHOP

"Father. . .

let your Church be continually renewed
and show the image of Christ in the world
by being conformed to His likeness."

(Opening Prayer).

St. Charles Borromeo (1538-1584) lived and worked during a time of reformation and renewal following the Council of Trent. This was a time in which the needs in the Church and in society as a whole were great. The successful conclusion of the third and final sessions of the Council were largely due to his efforts as papal secretary. His concern as priest and bishop was for the good of all and his foresight convinced him of the need for holy, dedicated and learned priests, bishops, as leaders of the Church. He directed his efforts at reforms that would accomplish this, though not without opposition. His ideals are precisely what we need today — he organized his priests into a society for personal and spiritual development and growth. Others, like St. Francis de Sales, would follow his example. St. Charles initiated a positive program of intellectual and cultural formation in an atmosphere designed to promote spiritual growth for those preparing for the priesthood. His principles for the education of seminarians and priests are valid still today. These principles have been vindicated from the time of their initiation in the post Tridentine Church to the post Vatican II Church.

Well educated in both civil and Church law Charles Borromeo was a very pastoral priest and bishop, so much so that one biographer wrote of him: "his life is a textbook of pastoral theology" for bishops. The prayer over the gifts notes that St. Charles was "an example of virtue and concern for the pastoral ministry, and in the prayer after communion we ask for "the courage and strength which made St. Charles faithful in his ministry and constant in his love."

Much of his preaching was to his priests, but he also gave

sound advice to others. His advice to teachers was: "study diligently and apply yourself to whatever is necessary for doing the job well Be sure you first preach by the way you live." To pastors he said: "Do not neglect the parish of your own soul, do not give yourself to others so completely that you have nothing left for yourself. You have to be mindful of your people without becoming forgetful of yourself." To his priests he constantly gave encouragement to pray and meditate "before, during and after everything we do." He told them: "this is the way we can easily overcome the countless difficulties we have to face day after day, which, after all, are part of our work; in meditation we find the strength to bring Christ to birth in ourselves and in other men." (Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

St. Charles Borromeo died in 1584 at the age of 46, at Milan, and was canonized in 1610. "He was one of the towering figures of the Catholic Reformation, a patron of learning and arts, and though he achieved a position of great power, he used it with humility, personal sanctity and unselfishness to reform the Church of the evils and abuses of his time." (J. Delaney, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 115).

The responsory to the second reading in the *Liturgy of the Hours* is a pertinent reflection for today:

Seek after integrity and holiness, faith, love, patience,
gentleness.

These are the things you must command and teach; be an
example to all who believe.

If you give them this advice, you will be a good servant of
Jesus Christ.

(Cf. 1 Timothy 6:11; 4:11; 12:6).

DEDICATION OF ST. JOHN LATERAN

There was a young man who wanted to find God, so he went into a large and beautiful church. He expected that in the spaciousness, light and reflection of the stained glass and glittering mosaics he might experience God. Filled with feelings of God's closeness, he put his head down on the back of a pew. A few minutes later he felt a tapping on the shoulder, and looking up he saw an elderly lady. She asked: "Are you hungry? I could give you a few dollars to get something to eat?" Realizing the risk the woman had taken to approach him, and the simple love that prompted it, the man thanked her, but said that he was alright. A few minutes later he left the church knowing that he had found God.

God can be experienced wherever he is present — He has many temples. We tend to localize his presence in special places, namely, churches. But God's universal temple is the whole of creation, and God is found there, especially in the depths of the human person, created in his image.

The Opening Prayer of Mass for this day reads: "God our Father, from living stones, your chosen people, you build an eternal temple to your glory." Or in an alternate prayer: "Father, you called your people to be your Church." We understand 'Church' as the Christian community "gathered to hear the word of God, to offer intercessions and praise to him, and above all to celebrate the holy mysteries." The Church is the community in action. (*The Rite of the Dedication of a Church*, n. 13).

Jesus told us that the kingdom of God is within us. All we need do is open ourselves to Him so that He can shine on the world through us. The elderly lady in the church carried God's presence in a very real way; she was a living temple to God.

The First Reading (*Genesis 28:11-18*) makes it clear that God is present in special physical places. We can find God in church buildings, not because it is a church, but because of the attitude we have there. Every place in the world is sacred and holy, if we

are open to knowing God.

The Second Reading (*I Cor. 3:9-13, 16-17*) shows us another kind of temple of God. People are God's temples: "You are God's building. . . Are you not aware that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" As God's temples people can touch God through us.

This building in which we are gathered is also God's temple. This means that God's presence here is special, and it means that our presence is special, too. Symbolically we purify ourselves with holy water before we enter. We recognize the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ, reserved in the tabernacle. This is a place for getting in touch with ourselves and God by praying, praising, interceding, and offering sacrifice. But it is just one place; there are many other places — our homes, our places of work, of play.

What we celebrate today on this feast, in a word, is God's presence among us, and in us. All these words are just reminders of the many ways that God is with us, and to make us aware of the treasure that we carry within us: God Himself.

ST. LEO THE GREAT, POPE, DOCTOR

Pope St. Leo the Great (d. 461) was elected in the year 440 and guided the Church through a most difficult period of its history. The Western Roman Empire was subjected to invasions by the barbarians. It was a time during which "traditional orthodoxy was imposed, fixed formulae and precise canons were giving a definite cast to liturgical and disciplinary life, and theology was defining its position on the fundamental questions of the Incarnation and the relation of divine grace and human freedom." (J. Quasten, *Patrology*, v. 3, p. 590).

We know little of his personal life, but we know he was held in great esteem prior to his election as Bishop of Rome. As the bishop he preached often and his homilies are classic instructions on the mysteries of Christ. In them he encourages the faithful "to live their baptism in imitation of Jesus and to preserve their faith from the danger of heresies." (Quasten, *Op. cit.* p. 591).

Through his writing and preaching he made lasting contributions to the definition of doctrine, to an understanding of the role of the papacy and its relation to bishops, the development of Church law, to the development of the Roman liturgy. His homilies and letters are the chief sources for coming to an appreciation of this talented, competent bishop of Rome.

J. Quasten expresses an appreciation of this saint: "Leo's pastoral activity. . . was marked always by a vivid awareness of his dignity and authority. Yet while requiring the recognition of his lofty mission at the service of all the churches, Leo never forgot *humilitas* (humility), i.e. his total dependence on Christ, the true Lord of the Church." (*Op. cit.*, p. 593).

The Opening Prayer of Mass also gives an indication of the appreciation of the Church for this great pontiff:

"God our Father,
you will never allow the power of hell
to prevail against your Church,
founded on the rock of the apostle Peter.

Let the prayers of Pope Leo the Great
keep us faithful to your truth
and secure in your peace."

The introductory note in the *Liturgy of the Hours* states: "He was a true pastor and father of souls. He labored strenuously to safeguard the integrity of the faith and vigorously defended the unity of the Church. He pushed back or at least softened the onrush of the barbarians. He has deservedly won the title "the Great." He died in 461 A.D.

ST. MARTIN OF TOURS, BISHOP

"A conscientious objector who wanted to be a monk; a monk who was maneuvered into being a bishop; a bishop who fought paganism as well as pleaded for mercy to heretics; such was Martin of Tours, one of the most popular of saints." (*Saint of the Day*, ed. by Leonard Foley, OFM, v. 2, p. 142).

Born in Pannonia (Hungary), Martin was the son of a pagan military officer. At age 15 he was inducted into military service against his will. Legend has it that in the year 337 on a cold day he cut his cloak in half and shared it with a beggar, and that evening he had a vision of Jesus wearing the piece of his cloak. Martin became a Christian and refused to engage in any more military activity, and was discharged. He became a monk and spent several years preaching to pagans and heretics. After some time he placed himself under the direction of St. Hilary of Poitiers, and gathered together others interested in a monastic life.

Reluctantly he acceded to the wish of the people and became Bishop of Tours about the year 371. Zealous in his pastoral office he went about making and keeping peace. He was gentle in dealing with all and particularly appealed for gentleness in dealing with heretics. His hope was always to win them to the truth. Martin endured opposition because of his goodness.

The Responsory to the Second Reading in the Office of Readings acknowledges these pastoral traits:

"Happy this man who did not deceive, nor judge, nor condemn anyone.

He spoke only of Christ, of His peace and His mercy
Here is a man whom words cannot describe."

And the Antiphon at the Magnificat in Evening Prayer reads:

"This blessed bishop loved Christ with all his strength and had no fear of earthly rulers; though he did not die a martyr's death, this holy confessor won the martyr's palm."

By his life and death St. Martin of Tours offered to God worship and praise. He gave himself completely to God's service. (Cf. Opening Prayer and Prayer After Communion).

ST. JOSAPHAT, BISHOP, MARTYR

St. Josaphat was a martyr for Christian unity. Successful for a time in the difficult ministry to Lithuanian and Ruthenian Christians, his death in 1623 ended hopes for reunion.

Born of Orthodox parents, Josaphat (1580-1623) embraced the Catholic faith and became a Basilian monk at Vilna, Lithuania. He was a compelling preacher and an advocate of union of the Ukrainian Church with Rome. Appointed Bishop of Vitebsk, Russia and later Metropolitan of Polotsk, he initiated reforms. Those who opposed him brought charges that he was interested in Latinizing the Ukrainian Church. It was these quarrels that led to his martyrdom in 1623. He was canonized in 1867, the first formally canonized saint of the Eastern Rite.

Pope Pius XI in his encyclical letter *Ecclesiam Dei* (1923), said that St. Josaphat:

“is rightly looked upon as the great glory and strength of the Eastern Rite Slavs. Few have brought them greater honor or contributed more to their spiritual welfare than Josaphat, their pastor and apostle, especially when he gave his life as a martyr for the unity of the Church. He felt, in fact, that God had inspired him to restore worldwide unity to the Church and he realized that his greatest chance of success lay in preserving the Slavonic rite and St. Basil’s rule of monastic life within the one universal Church.”

We honor him today for his courage “to lay down his life for his people,” and ask that we be “strong and willing to offer our lives for our brothers and sisters.” (Opening Prayer).



ST. FRANCES XAVIER CABRINI, VIRGIN

On July 7, 1946 Frances Xavier Cabrini became the first citizen of the United States to be canonized. Pope Pius XII said in his homily that day:

"Inspired by the grace of God, we join the saints honoring the holy virgin Frances Xavier Cabrini. She was a humble woman who became outstanding not because she was famous, or rich or powerful, but because she lived a virtuous life. From the tender years of her youth, she kept her innocence as white as a lily and preserved it carefully with the thorns of penitence; as the years progressed, she was moved by a certain instinct and a supernatural zeal to dedicate her whole life to the service and greater glory of God."

Frances was foundress of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart (1880); their work was and is with orphans, in schools and with the sick. She wanted to be a missionary in China, but Pope Leo XIII urged her to go the United States and help preserve the faith of Italian immigrants. She came in 1889 and together with her sisters worked for the next 28 years in New York, and later in Chicago. She also established schools in Brazil, Argentina and Nicaragua. Mother Cabrini died on December 22, 1917 in Chicago.

Pope Pius XII commended her vibrant faith and her burning love for God as the sources of her strength. "In the face of the endless cares and anxieties of life, she never let anything turn her aside from striving and aiming to please God and to work for his glory for which nothing, aided by God's grace, seemed too laborious, or difficult, or beyond human strength." (Pius XII).

From Mother Cabrini we learn "concern for the stranger, the sick, the frustrated." (Opening Prayer). From her we learn the meaning of humble, prayerful dedication to the service of God through living for others, especially for those in need.



ST. ALBERT THE GREAT, BISHOP, DOCTOR

“God our Father,
you endowed St. Albert with the talent
of combining human wisdom with divine faith.”
(Opening Prayer).

St. Albert the Great (1206-1280) was one of the great scholars of the thirteenth century. He was a Dominican, an able teacher, knowledgeable in the natural sciences as well as in philosophy and theology. He influenced the content of study in the great medieval universities by introducing the study of Aristotle and Greek wisdom to the West. A diligent scholar, Albert's knowledge extended to mathematics, physics, astronomy, biology, chemistry, economics, politics and ethics, as well as to philosophy and theology. His greatest pupil was St. Thomas Aquinas. Appointed Bishop of Regensburg in 1260, he resigned two years later to resume teaching at Cologne.

For a reflection today we read from one of St. Albert's commentaries on the Gospel of St. Luke. He comments on the words of Jesus, “Do this in remembrance of me.” (22:19).

“Two things should be noted here. This is the first command that we should use this sacrament, which is indicated when [Jesus] says: *Do this*. The second is that this sacrament commemorates the Lord's going to death for our sake. . .

“This sacrament is profitable because it grants remission of sins; it is most useful because it bestows the fullness of grace on us in this life. . .Nor can we do anything more pleasant. For what is better than God manifesting His whole sweetness to us. . .He could not have commanded anything more beneficial, for this sacrament is the fruit of the tree of life. Anyone who receives this sacrament with the devotion of sincere faith will never taste death. . .Nor could He have commanded anything more lovable, for this sacrament

produces love and union. It is characteristic of the greatest love to give itself as food. . . Nor could he have commanded anything which is more like eternal life. Eternal life flows from this sacrament because God with all sweetness pours Himself out upon the blessed." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

St. Albert's spiritual writings arouse fervor and devotion. He was one of the thirteenth century authors who wrote of the cult of the Sacred Heart. For St. Albert the Heart of Jesus is the seat and symbol of love, which moves Jesus to institute the Blessed Eucharist. Speaking of the Heart of Jesus in a spiritual sense he wrote in a treatise on the Eucharist, alluding to the joy of the Sacred Heart at the institution of this sacrament: "His Heart overflowed with love and joy at being completely one with us and filling our hearts with joy and jubilation." (Cf. J. Stierli, *Heart of the Savior*, p. 78-79).

St. Albert the Great is called the "Universal Doctor" because of his brilliance and the scope of his learning and teaching. He was canonized and declared a doctor of the Church by Pope Pius XI in 1931.

As we honor St. Albert the Great today we pray that we "keep true to his teachings that the advance of human knowledge may deepen our knowledge and love of [God]." (Opening Prayer).

ST. MARGARET OF SCOTLAND

St. Margaret of Scotland (1046-1093) was Hungarian by birth, raised at the court of St. Stephen, King of Hungary, and later brought to England. Having to flee there after the battle of Hastings, she was shipwrecked off the coast of Scotland. She and her family were welcomed by King Malcolm whom Margaret married four years later, about 1070 A.D.

Their married life was blessed; they had eight children. Margaret was able to help Malcolm be a virtuous king and she was his trusted advisor. Together they practiced austerities and were generous to the poor and needy, often ministering to them personally. Margaret took great personal interest in the religious and spiritual life of the people, urging synods to correct the prevalent abuses of simony, usury and marriage between close relatives. Margaret died at Edinburgh in 1093, an ideal mother and queen.

St. Margaret's holiness in marriage is brought to mind through one of the readings today from the Office of Readings. From the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* we read:

"Husband and wife, by the covenant of marriage, are no longer two, but one flesh. By their intimate union of persons and actions they give mutual help and service to each other, experiencing the meaning of their unity, and gain an ever deeper understanding of it day by day.

"This intimate union in the mutual self-giving of two persons, as well as the good of the children, demands full fidelity from both, and an indissoluble unity between them.

"Christ the Lord has abundantly blessed this richly complex love, which springs from the divine source of love and is founded on the model of His union with the Church." (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 48).

St. Margaret of Scotland understood that being a truly fulfilled woman meant freedom to love God and to serve others. "Let

her example and prayers help us to become a living sign of [God's] goodness." (Opening Prayer).

ST. GERTRUDE, VIRGIN

A late thirteenth century Cistercian nun and mystic, St. Gertrude (1256-1301) teaches us the importance of a spirituality based on the liturgy. Well educated in Scripture and acquainted with the writings of St. Augustine and St. Bernard, she recorded her own spiritual and mystical experiences. In her spirituality she was not turned in on herself. Dom Francois Vandenbrouke; (*The spirituality of the Middle Ages* vol. 2 of *A History of Christian spirituality*), wrote: "Like St. Catherine of Siena later, she had the spirit of the Church. She was conscious of what her life as a nun, united to Christ by holiness and prayer, could accomplish for the mystical body." (p. 454).

For St. Gertrude, the liturgy played a great role in her spiritual development. Through the liturgy she appreciated the Christian mysteries. "The liturgy revealed to Gertrude what Christian piety had already taken to itself and delighted to make the object of its meditation — the humanity of Christ." (*ibid.* p. 451).

From St. Gertrude we learn much of the spirituality of her time. She is counted among the devotees to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as are other Cistercian nuns before her and contemporary to her, namely St. Lutgarde and St. Mechtilde. St. Gertrude's devotion to the Heart of Jesus centered on the graciousness of the Lord, rather than on the sorrow or sadness of Christ at the ingratitude of men which St. Margaret Mary emphasised three and half centuries later. The Heart of Jesus for St. Gertrude was a source of never ending graces:

"When after receiving the life-giving sacrament, I had come back to my place of prayer, it seemed to me as though there came forth from the crucifix depicted in my book (that is, from the wound in the side), something like a ray of sunshine. . . it sweetly drew my affection to itself." (from the *Legate of Divine Love*; quoted by Vandenbrouke, *Op. cit.*, p. 453).

We read at the Office of Readings a passage that reveals her consciousness of the humanity of Jesus. To appreciate this

passage one must know that St. Gertrude was placed in the care of the nuns at Helfta at the age of five. She did not freely chose the monastic life at first, and so lived it half-heartedly, but when she was about twenty-nine years old she got serious about her vocation. She wrote:

“To make amends for the way I previously lived, I offer you, most loving Father, all the sufferings of your beloved Son, from that first infant cry as he lay on the hay in the manger, until that final moment when, bowing his head, with a mighty voice, Christ gave up his spirit. I think, as I make this offering, all that He underwent, His needs as a baby, His dependence as a young child, the hardship of youth and trials of early manhood.

“And now, as an act of thanksgiving, I praise and worship you, Father, in deepest humility for your most loving kindness and mercy.” (From St. Gertrude’s *Revelations*, her spiritual autobiography).

St. Gertrude’s spiritual testimony, her abiding sense of the presence of God, can bring light into our darkness,” and can help us “experience the joy of [God’s] presence and the power of [his] grace.” (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY, RELIGIOUS

"In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of absolutely every person, of actively helping him when he comes across our path."
(*Gaudium et. Specs.*, n. 27).

Long before the II Vatican Council this teaching which we find in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* was understood and practiced by St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231). She recognized and honored Christ in the poor of this world (Cf. Opening Prayer).

As a young girl she was married to Louis of Thuringia whom she loved, and they had three children. Six years later Louis died of the plague. Elizabeth was then 20 years old. She was a pious young woman and became a Franciscan tertiary, after providing for her children. She dedicated the remaining four years of her life to caring for the poor and the sick, continuing what had already been the pattern of her life. Her confessor and spiritual director, Conrad of Marburg, tells of her in a letter that is read today in the Office of Readings. He tells us that she befriended the poor, visited and nursed the sick, generously gave all that she had as alms to the poor, keeping just one worn dress for her burial.

She died peacefully at Marburg, on November 17, not yet 24 years old. She was canonized four years after her death, by Pope Gregory IX in 1235, and her memory was revered by the poor she loved.

From St. Elizabeth of Hungary we learn to help others "in time of trouble and need." (Opening Prayer).



ST. ROSE PHILIPPINE DUCHESNE

"No greater saint ever died in Missouri or perhaps in the whole Union," wrote Fr. Pierre de Smet, S.J. He was speaking of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne (1769-1852), Religious of the Sacred Heart, pioneer missionary nun to the Mississippi Valley.

Born in Grenoble, France, she heard as a child, stories from a Jesuit missionary to the Louisiana Territory about Indians. From that point on the desire to work among them was kindled. At age 17 she sought to enter the Visitation Convent, but the outbreak of the French Revolution and the expulsion of many Religious from France prevented it. Only years later at age 33 did she realize her desire to become a nun when she entered the Religious of the Sacred Heart, founded by St. Madelaine Sophie Barat.

A few years later she again became interested in the missions in North America, but it was to be several more years before she was able to lead a group of Sisters to the United States. In 1818, 49 years old, she arrived in St. Louis, but Bishop Dubourg had no work for them among the Indians. She and her Sisters settled in St. Louis and established a convent, a school and an orphanage for girls. She was instrumental in the founding of six other convents along the Mississippi River between St. Louis and New Orleans.

Finally at age 71 she got her wish and the opportunity to work among the Indians in Sugar Creek, Kansas. In an essay in *Builders of America*, Fr. Albert J. Nevins wrote that Mother Duchesne was too old to learn the Potawatomi language, so she spoke the international language of kindness and love. Since she could not teach, she decided to pray for the success of their work. She did that for long hours every day and the Indians named her "Woman Who Always Prays."

During her last years, despite ill health, she continued to spend many hours in prayer and penitential practices. At age 83, she died on Nov. 18, 1852 at St. Charles, Missouri. Beatified in 1940,

she was canonized on July 3, 1988 by Pope John Paul II.

In his homily at the Mass of canonization Pope John Paul II said:

“Rose Philippine’s whole life was transformed and enlightened by her love for Christ in the Eucharist. During the long hours she spent before the Blessed Sacrament, she learned to live continually in the presence of God. She placed all her hopes and desires in Him. . . With missionary courage, this great pioneer looked to the future with the eyes of the heart, a heart that was on fire with God’s love. . . She took upon herself the Gospel injunction to go and teach all nations, reminding us that the call to holiness is universal and does not know the boundaries of nations, political systems, culture or race.”

“This recognition of Rose Philippine Duchesne’s sainthood encourages us to continue to be of service until late in life. It spurs people in the world to go beyond their own borders and increases our devotion to prayer and contemplation. Since she spent much of her early life as a vigorous lay woman, it also stimulates those who want to show their solidarity with the poor of the world.” (Sr. Ann O’Neil, Provincial Superior, Sisters of the Sacred Heart).

It is a great and timely tribute to a woman, a saint, of strong faith and vision.

DEDICATION OF THE CHURCHES OF PETER AND PAUL

The entrance Antiphon for this Mass honoring Sts. Peter and Paul is from Psalm 44:17-18.

"You have made them princes over all the earth; they declared your fame to all generations; forever will the nations declare your praise,"

Today's commemoration takes us back to the beginnings of the Church. To Peter, appointed leader of the apostolic college. He was a man of action, and we recall his impetuous words: "Lord, if it is really you, tell me to come to you across the water," and "Beyond doubt you are the Son of God." We also are taken back to Paul, a fearless preacher, who was tireless in his zeal. While under house arrest in Rome for two years, "With full assurance and without any hindrance whatever, he preached the reign of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ."

In our Opening Prayer we asked the protection of these great apostles. It is fitting that we give them special honor and recognition as we commemorate the dedication of the impressive Roman basilicas bearing their names. And we ask their intercession that the Church will "grow in [God's] grace until the end of time."



ST. CECILIA, VIRGIN, MARTYR

St. Cecilia was born in Rome to a patrician family and raised a Christian. Legend says that she was married against her will, but convinced her husband Valerian to respect her virginity and to become a Christian himself, and converted his brother Tiburtius as well. They then devoted themselves to charitable works and to burying Christian martyrs. Valerian and Tiburtius were apprehended and martyred, and Cecilia was arrested after burying them. She was sentenced to be suffocated, but miraculously was saved. Then she was sentenced to be beheaded. The executioner bungled the job and Cecilia lived for three days mortally wounded.

Devotion to St. Cecilia dates to the fifth century, and her name is mentioned in the Roman Canon among the virgin martyrs of the early Roman Church.

St. Cecilia is the patroness of music and musicians. The legends do not say she was a musician, but rather that at her wedding she did not hear the nuptial music and sounds of merriment, but sat apart, singing to God in her heart. (Cf. J. Delaney, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 141). St. Augustine wrote that "words cannot express the things that are sung by the heart."

The stories of the early virgin martyrs, fact or legend, continue to inspire us today. We marvel at the grace of God and at the courage of these young women, wise and strong in faith. It must have been frustrating to the civil authorities in the Roman Empire who ordered the execution of young Christians. As St. Augustine said: "The martyrs were bound, imprisoned, scourged, racked, burnt, rent, butchered — and they multiplied." And of their virginity Augustine wrote: "Not because it is virginity is it held in honor, but because it is consecrated to God."



ST. CLEMENT I, POPE, MARTYR

St. Clement was a disciple of St. Peter and several important early sources say that Peter intended that Clement succeed him as head of the Roman community. Clement relinquished the pontificate to Linus, however, and after the death of Anacletus (or Cletus) resumed the pontificate, and so he is numbered as the third successor of St. Peter, beginning about the year 91. Clement is an esteemed figure from the first century Roman Church. His name is mentioned in the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), and though he is honored as a martyr, there is some doubt that he was actually martyred.

Some insight into the nature and character of this revered Roman bishop is had from his only extant writing, an *Epistle to the Corinthians*, a very pastoral document. Its purpose was to settle a quarrel in the Church of Corinth, a rebellion against authority. In the letter, Clement counsels humility, temperance, faith and good works. God the Creator of order in nature, he says, requires obedience from His creatures. Love should take the place of discord; charity should prompt forgiveness.

The language of the letter is appealing, and from it we glean a short meditation for today:

"The great cannot exist without the small, nor the small without the great; they blend together to their mutual advantage. Take the body, for example. The head is nothing without the feet, just as the feet are nothing without the head. The smallest parts of our body are necessary and valuable to the whole. All work together and are mutually subject for the preservation of the whole body.

"Our entire body, then, will be preserved in Christ Jesus, and each of us should be subject to his neighbor in accordance with the grace given to each. The stronger should care for the weak, and the weak should respect the stronger. The wealthy should give to the poor, and the poor man should thank God that he has sent someone to supply his needs.

The wise should manifest their wisdom not in words, but in good deeds, and the humble should not talk about their own humility but allow others to bear witness to it. Since, therefore, we have all this from Him, we ought to thank Him for it all." (from the *Epistle to the Corinthians*; Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

ST. COLUMBAN, ABBOT

The greatest Irish missionary to continental Europe, St. Columban, became a monk as a young man on the advice of a holy woman who lived as a hermit. He understood her advice as a call to renounce the world and to seek God in monastic solitude. It was only when he was 45 years old that he left the monastery with the blessings of his abbot and went to Gaul with twelve companions to reinvigorate religion which had suffered from the destructive invasions of the Barbarians. They preached with some success, known for their charity and devotion and for their rigorous discipline.

The monasteries Columban founded became centers of religion and learning, the most famous of which is that at Bobbio in northern Italy. It was there that he died in the year 615.

Columban recommended to his monks contemplation and the study of the Scriptures as the means of knowing and fulfilling the will of God. That study was to be undertaken devoutly and calmly. His preaching was very meditative:

God "fashioned man from clay and endowed him with the nobility of His own image. What has man in common with God? . . . It is a glorious privilege that God should grant man His eternal image and the likeness of His character. Man's likeness to God, if he preserves it, imparts high dignity. If man applies the virtues planted in his soul to the right purpose, he will be like God. God's commands have taught us to give back the virtues He sowed in us in our first innocence. . . Let us not imprint on ourselves the image of a despot, but let Christ paint his image in us with his words: *My peace I give you, my peace I leave with you.* But the knowledge that peace is good is of no benefit to us if we do not practice it." (Instruction 11: Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

The preservation of European civilization and culture must be credited to these missionary monks and their successors. Their

austerity and discipline served them well in the task of carrying the message of the Gospel to a continent ravaged by Barbarians. They built the foundation for the marvellous culture of the High Middle Ages and Renaissance. Western civilization and the Church owe much to their zeal, their prayers and their example.

ST. ANDREW, APOSTLE

Andrew, brother of Simon Peter, was one of the first called by Jesus. In the Gospel of St. John (1:40) he was a disciple of John the Baptist. He was "one of the two who followed John." In the Gospel of Mark he was called while fishing with Peter, (1:16). His name appears only on two other occasions in the Gospel of John: he calls attention to the boy with the loaves and fishes which were multiplied to feed the people (John 6:8), and he acts as an intermediary between Jesus and the Greeks who had approached Philip with the request to meet Jesus (John 12:22).

Tradition tells us that Andrew preached the gospel in Scythia (Central Asia east of the Caspian Sea) and in Greece, and later in Byzantium. A very old tradition tells that he was crucified on an X-shaped cross in Patras in Achaia (Southern Greece).

From a homily of St. John Chrysostom, commenting on Andrew's words to Peter: "We have found the Messiah," we read in today's Office of Readings:

"Notice how his words reveal what he has learned in so short a time. They show the power of the master who has convinced them of this truth. They reveal the zeal and concern of men preoccupied with this question from the very beginning. Andrew's words reveal a soul waiting with the utmost longing for the coming of the Messiah, looking forward to His appearing from heaven, rejoicing when He does appear, and hastening to announce so great an event to others. To support one another in the things of the spirit is the true sign of good will between brothers, of loving kinship and sincere affection."

"When John the Baptist said: *This is the Lamb*, and he baptizes in the Spirit, he left the deeper understanding of these things to be received from Christ. All the more so would Andrew act in the same way, since he did not think himself capable to give a complete explanation. He brought his brother to the very source of light, and Peter was so

joyful and eager that he would not delay even for a moment." (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

On this feast of St. Andrew we pray:

"Lord. . .

You called Andrew the apostle
to preach the gospel and guide your Church in faith.
May he always be our friend in your presence to help us
with his prayers." (Opening Prayer).

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER, PRIEST

"The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. . . Now what was once preached by the Lord. . . must be proclaimed and spread to the ends of the earth. . . Although the obligation of spreading the faith falls individually on every disciple of Christ, still the Lord has called from the number of his disciples those whom he has chosen that they might be with him so that he might send them to preach to the nations." (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad gentes*, nos. 2, 3, & 23).

One of these privileged chosen disciples is St. Francis Xavier. He is the first of the great Jesuit missionaries to the Far East, and the greatest post-apostolic missionary of the Church. He preached the gospel in India, Malaysia and Japan.

Francis met St. Ignatius at the University of Paris in 1528, was won over by Ignatius and was among the first seven who took vows in the Society of Jesus founded by Ignatius. This was in 1534. Three years later he was ordained a priest in Venice together with Ignatius and four others. From there they went to Rome to offer their services to the pope.

In 1541 Francis set out for the East Indies, arriving in Goa in April of that year. He preached first to the Portugese there and then moved on to South India, later to Malaysia and Japan. Always, as his letters to Ignatius indicate, he went about with enthusiasm and joy. The success of Francis Xavier is legendary.

"We have visited the villages of the new converts who accepted the Christian religion a few years ago. . . the country is so barren and poor. The native Christians have no priests. They know only that they *are* Christians. There is nobody to say Mass for them; nobody to teach them the Creed, the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Commandments of God's Law.

"I have not stopped since the day I arrived. I conscientiously made the rounds of the villages. I bathed in the sacred waters all the children who had not yet been baptized. This means that I have purified a very large number of children so young. . .

"Many, many people hereabouts are not becoming Christians for one reason only: there is nobody to make them Christians," (Letter to St. Ignatius: Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

St. Francis Xavier died on the Island of Sancian off the China coast in 1552.

The II Vatican Council reminds us:

"As members of the living Christ. . .all the faithful have an obligation to collaborate in the expansion and spread of his Body, so that they might bring it to fullness as soon as possible." (Cf. Eph. 4:13). *Ad gentes*, 36.

The Council then tells us that once we are aware of our responsibility for the world we can contribute to the spread of the faith by leading a profound Christian life. "This fervor will be like a new spiritual breeze throughout the Church. . .From this renewed spirit prayers and works of penance will be spontaneously offered to God that by his grace he might make fruitful the work of missionaries, that there might be missionary vocations, and the support of which the missions stand in need might be forthcoming." (*ibid*).

We cannot all be actual missionaries to the distant lands and peoples who are still in darkness; but through "those whom God has chosen for this very special work the whole community prays, collaborates and works among the nations." (*Ad gentes*, 37).

May we learn from the zeal of St. Francis Xavier so that through us the Church may grow throughout the world. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. JOHN DAMASCENE, PRIEST, DOCTOR

The last of the Greek Fathers, John (676-749) was born in Damascus, Syria. Well educated in philosophy and theology, John, after some years as a revenue officer in the service of a Caliph, became a monk and later was ordained a priest.

In 726 when the veneration of sacred images was prohibited by the Byzantine Emperor Leo, John zealously defended the Catholic position in his writings. He is highly regarded, too, for his systematic treatises, especially for an exposition of the Greek Fathers, used later even in the Western schools. Byzantine liturgical books make use of hymns and canons in honor of the Mother of God, and other texts composed by him, such as the Office of the Dead.

John died in 749 in the Monastery of St. Sabas, near Jerusalem. Pope Leo XIII deservedly declared him a Doctor of the Church in 1890.

Throughout his life John Damascene appreciated his Catholic faith. At the beginning of his Statement of Faith, from which we read today, he wrote:

“O Lord, you led me from my father’s loins and formed me in my mother’s womb. You brought me, a naked babe, into the light of day, for nature’s laws always obey your commands.

“By the blessing of the Holy Spirit, you prepared my creation and my existence, not because man willed it or flesh desired it, but by your ineffable grace. The birth you prepared for me was such that it surpassed the laws of our nature. You sent me forth into the light by adopting me as your son and you enrolled me among the children of your holy and spotless Church.” (Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

“May the true faith that [St. John Damascene] taught so well always be our light and our strength.” (Opening Prayer).



ST. NICHOLAS, BISHOP

Honored in both the Eastern and Western Churches, we know only that St. Nicholas was Bishop of Myra in Lycia (now part of Turkey). In the East he is called the Wonderworker, and legends abound. Two beautiful prayers in the Byzantine Liturgy for this commemoration express an appreciation of this saint. I quote them, a *Troparion* and a *Kontakion*:

"O Father and Pontiff Nicholas, the holiness of your life was set before your flock as a rule of faith, an example of meekness and a teaching of temperance; wherefore you acquired greatness through humility and spiritual wealth through poverty. Pray to Christ God that he may save our souls."

"In Myra, you proved yourself to be a priest, a servant of divine things, O Saint, for you fulfilled the Gospel of Christ, O Holy One: you gave up your life for your people and saved the innocent from death. You have been sanctified, for you were a great guide towards the things of God." (Byzantine Daily Worship).

These indicate the popularity of the veneration of St. Nicholas.

The Eastern liturgy speaks of him as a model bishop. The II Vatican Council in the *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church* teaches:

"In exercising his office of father and pastor the bishop should be with his people as one who serves, as a good shepherd who knows his sheep and whose sheep know him, as a true father who excels in his love and solicitude for all. . . He should so unite and mold his flock into one family that all, conscious of their duties, may live and act in the communion of charity."

St. Nicholas was such a model bishop, and now a saint.



ST. AMBROSE, BISHOP AND DOCTOR

St. Ambrose (340-397) was considered "by his contemporaries as the exemplar . . . of what a bishop should be — holy, learned, courageous, patient and immovable when necessitated for the faith." (J. Delaney, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 49).

Ambrose was born in Trier, Germany, where his father was Prefect of Gaul. He was taken to Rome after the death of his father, and educated there in the law. He took a position in government as governor of Milan about 370. Still a catechumen, he was chosen to be bishop when he intervened to keep peace among conflicting factions at the election of a bishop. Baptized on December 7, he was consecrated bishop a week later. From that day on he became a churchman, *par excellence*. In a *Life of Ambrose*, written by St. Paulinus of Nola in 422, he wrote that Bishop Ambrose "bestowed all the gold and silver he possessed on the Church for the poor. He even gave the Church the landholdings he owned. . . and left nothing here below which he could call his own." (*Vita Ambrosii*, 38).

As bishop he was strong in his defense of Catholic truth and as a preacher well versed in sacred scripture. He had a personal interest in liturgy for which he composed hymns. He will always be remembered for the spark of faith he kindled in St. Augustine who heard his sermons and whom he baptised at Easter in 385. Augustine noted in his *Confessions* that Ambrose devoted himself to study and prayer on the Word of God.

Politically astute and experienced he formulated principles for Church-State relations that are valid still today. For Ambrose, the Church was a perfect society in itself, and so entitled to govern itself, free from any interference from the State. Furthermore the Church had the right to the protection of the State, and the duty to correct the errors of government. Ambrose boldly and courageously defended these principles.

The Opening Prayer of Mass calls him "an outstanding teacher of the Catholic faith" with "the courage of an apostle."

Of great interest and easily understood is his writing on the presence of Christ manifested to the one who relying on faith, has left everything for him:

“Thus we have everything in Christ. Let every soul go to him, whether it be sick from the sins of the body, or pierced with the nails of some desire of this age; or still imperfect — provided that it goes forward in persevering meditation, or is already perfect in many virtues: everything is within Christ’s power, and Christ is everything to us. If you wish to be healed of your wound, He is the healer; if you burn with fevers, He is the fountain; if you are laden with iniquity, He is justice; if you have need of help, He is strength; if you fear death, He is life; if you desire heaven, He is the way to it; if you flee from darkness, He is the light; if you seek food, He is nourishment.” (*On Virginity*, ix).

St. Ambrose was the outstanding bishop in Italy in his time. Even the bishops of Rome looked to him for leadership and guidance. From his contemporaries we know he was appreciated for his sensitive, human gentleness, and his deep evangelical spirit. He had high ascetical ideals that are revealed in his writings. His occasional rigidity was balanced by his understanding of human feelings.

He is truly an outstanding, courageous teacher of the Gospel, and a worthy Doctor of the Church.

ST. DAMASUS I, POPE

It is only appropriate that St. Damasus, who composed epitaphs for the tombstones of many martyrs, should have one himself, and he provided his own:

“He who walking on the sea could calm the bitter waves, who gives life to the dying seeds of the earth; He who was able to loose the mortal chains of death, and after three days’ darkness could bring again to the upper world the brother for his sister Martha; He, I believe, will make Damasus rise again from the dust.”

Damasus (305-384) was born in Rome where his father was a priest. Damasus was ordained a deacon, and in the year 366 was chosen to be Bishop of Rome. His pontificate was made difficult, in part, by a struggle with an anti-pope that was resolved only after bloodshed. As pope, he was zealous in defending the Church against heresy, but like many in the West did not understand the subtleties of controversies in the East. During his pontificate the Church was declared the official religion of the Roman State (in the year 380). Latin became the principal language of the liturgy in the West and it was Damasus who encouraged St. Jerome to translate the Bible into Latin.

He defended the primacy of the papacy on the basis that the Bishop of Rome was the successor of St. Peter. He is noted, too, for his building of churches and the reconstruction of the catacombs and the preservation of papal archives.

His writings of note are his epigrams for the tombs of the martyrs. For an appreciation of the cult of the martyrs we turn to St. Augustine. In a treatise from which we read in part today, we find:

“We venerate the martyrs with the same veneration of love and fellowship that we give to the holy men of God still with us. We sense that the hearts of these latter are just as ready to suffer death for the sake of the Gospel, and yet we feel more devotion toward those who have already

emerged victorious from the struggle. We honor those who are fighting on the battlefield of this life here below, but we honor more confidently those who have already achieved the victor's crown and live in heaven. . .

"We . . . assemble to celebrate the memory of the martyrs with ritual solemnity because we want to be inspired to follow their example, share in their merits, and be helped by their prayers." (from a treatise against Faustus).

The Opening Prayer of Mass acknowledges Damasus' love and honor given to the martyrs, and we ask that we may "continue to celebrate their witness for Christ."

ST. LUCY, VIRGIN, MARTYR

Legends make good stories, and often they are edifying and inspiring to young and old alike. In the case of the saints we all have our favorites and among them are the legends of the early virgin martyrs: Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, Agatha, Anastasia. All are mentioned in the ancient Roman Canon of the Mass and all are greatly honored in Rome.

According to one tradition Lucy was born in Syracuse, Sicily. When she refused marriage, she was denounced as a christian and condemned to a brothel. However, the guards were unable to move her and she was ordered to be burned. The flames did not harm her and finally she was stabbed through the throat.

St. Lucy is invoked by those with eye trouble, probably because her name means "light." In one of the traditions her eyes were torn out by her judge; in another legend she tore them out herself to present to a suitor she disliked who admired them. In both instances they were miraculously restored. (Cf. J. Delaney, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 366).

"Believers who wish to remain virgins share in the virginity of the Church. Virginity is an essentially eschatological reality and assumes its full meaning only in the final fulfillment of the Messianic nuptials." The first letter to the Corinthians clearly teaches that virginity is not a command (7:25), but a personal call from God (7:7), that allows for freedom from distractions in the tension of present life. It is an ideal and in no way detracts from the ideal of Christian marriage which is also a call from God. (Cf. "Virginity" in the *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. by Xavier Leon-Dufour). Each is called upon to support the grace and vocation of the other.

We celebrate today the martyrdom of St. Lucy and her entrance into eternal glory, and ask to share her happiness in heaven. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS, PRIEST, DOCTOR

"I should boast of nothing but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; through him the world is crucified to me, and I to the world." (*Galatians 6:14*).

"Father, you endowed John of the Cross with a spirit of self-denial and a love of the cross." (Opening Prayer).

The Entrance Antiphon and the first sentence of our Opening Prayer set the tone for the liturgy honoring St. John of the Cross (1542-1591). John was a Carmelite priest, and after meeting St. Teresa of Jesus (of Avila) he was persuaded by her to lead a reform and renewal among his religious brethren.

The spirituality of John of the Cross was centered on the experience of the Cross. Union with God is achieved through a rigorous discipline, abandonment to God and purification of the will and of the senses. He explains his personal spiritual odyssey in his writings, especially in *The Ascent to Mount Carmel*, but more so in *The Dark Night of the Soul*. It is difficult to summarize the process of attaining union with God, but perhaps it could be put in this way: If one wants to save one's life, one must lose it in God through a spirit of abandonment and self-denial.

The spirit of John's writings and life are captured in this following excerpt from a spiritual canticle which we read in today's Office of Readings:

"Though holy doctors have uncovered many mysteries and wonders, and devout souls have understood them in this earthly condition of ours, yet the greater part still remains to be unfolded by them, and even to be understood by them.

"We must then dig deeply in Christ. He is like a rich mine with many pockets containing treasures: however deep we dig we will never find their end or their limit. Indeed, in every pocket new seams of fresh riches are discovered on all sides.

“For this reason the apostle Paul said of Christ: *In him are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God.* The soul cannot enter into these treasures, nor attain them, unless it first crosses into and enters the thicket of suffering, enduring interior and exterior labors, and unless it first receives from God very many blessings in the intellect and in the senses, and has undergone long spiritual training.

“All these are lesser things, disposing the soul for the lofty sanctuary of knowledge of the mysteries of Christ: this is the highest wisdom attainable in this life.

“Would that men might come at last to see that it is quite impossible to reach the thicket of the riches and wisdom of God except by first entering the thicket of much suffering, in such a way that the soul finds there its consolation and desire. The soul that longs for divine wisdom chooses first, and in truth, to enter the thicket of the cross.” (Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

One of the great mystics of all time, St. John of the Cross was canonized in 1726, and in 1926 Pope Pius XI proclaimed him a Doctor of the Church.

ST. PETER CANISIUS, PRIEST, DOCTOR

St. Peter Canisius (1521-1597) is sometimes called "the second apostle of Germany." He is a very important person in the Catholic Counter Reformation which followed the Council of Trent, several sessions of which he had attended.

Born in Nijmegen in the Netherlands, he entered the Society of Jesus after studying at Cologne and Louvain. He was ordained a priest in 1546 and was first given a teaching assignment. As he was noted for his preaching, Duke William of Bavaria asked that he be sent to Germany to revive Catholicism. A popular and eloquent preacher, he zealously defended the faith, authored a simple catechism, taught and established colleges and seminaries. His influence was widespread and lasting.

Prior to his assignment to Germany, St. Peter Canisius tells of a spiritual experience. After acknowledging his acceptance of that mission, he continued:

"At length, it was as if you opened to me the heart in your most sacred body; I seemed to see it directly before my eyes. You told me to drink from this fountain, inviting me, that is, to draw the waters of salvation from your wellsprings, my Savior. I was most eager that streams of faith, hope and love should flow into me from that source. I was thirsting for poverty, chastity, obedience. I asked to be clothed, to be wholly cleaned by you, to be made resplendent by you.

"So after daring to approach your most loving heart and to plunge my thirst in it, I received a promise from you of a garment made of three parts: these were to cover my soul in its nakedness, and to belong especially to my religious profession. They were peace, love and perseverance. Protected by this garment of salvation, I was confident that I would lack nothing but all would succeed and give you glory." (Cf. 2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

St. Peter Canisius was canonized in 1925 and declared a Doctor of the Church. The Antiphon at the *Benedictus* reads:

“Those who are learned will be as radiant as the sky in all its beauty; those who instruct the people in goodness will shine like the stars for all eternity.”

SAINT JOHN OF KANTY, PRIEST

A humble man known for his kindness to the poor, and for his personal austerity and prayerfulness, St. John of Kanty (1390-1474) was a priest of the diocese of Cracow, Poland. He was a brilliant professor of Scripture, but the jealous opposition of his associates led him to become a parish priest. After a time he returned to his teaching at the University of Cracow.

A letter of Pope Clement XIII who canonized him states:

“Saint John of Kanty deserves a high place among the great saints and scholars who practice what they preach and defend the true faith against those who attack it. . .At the pulpit he fought to raise the standard of holiness among the faithful, and his preaching was reinforced by his humility, his chastity and his compassion, his bodily penance and the other qualities of a dedicated priest and apostle. . .With his humility went a rare and childlike simplicity. . .” (2nd Reading, *Liturgy of the Hours*).

In the Opening Prayer at Mass we ask that “through the example of John of Kanty. . .we grow in the wisdom of the saints.”

ST. STEPHEN, DEACON, FIRST MARTYR

Chapters six and seven of the *Acts of the Apostles* tell us what we know of St. Stephen, the first martyr. He was a deacon, one of seven especially chosen by the apostles. He was “a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit,” (6:5) and after the apostles laid hands on Stephen, he was “filled with grace and power, [and] was working great wonders and signs among the people.” (6:8).

It is prophetic that the first martyr was one who engaged in the task of caring for the poor and needy. These are traditional concerns for God’s prophets from ancient times to the present. Stephen’s life and virtue were a rebuke to those who resisted the grace of God. He told his persecutors: “You always oppose the Holy Spirit; you are just like your ancestors.” (Acts 7:51). Like many prophets before him he was unjustly killed because he spoke for God.

“The gates of heaven opened out to blessed Stephen, and he was crowned first of martyrs.” (Antiphon at *Benedictus*).

At the Office of Readings today we read from a sermon by St. Fulgentius of Ruspe, bishop:

“... The love that brought Christ from heaven to earth raised Stephen from earth to heaven; shown first in the king, it later shone forth in his soldier. Love was Stephen’s weapon by which he gained every battle, and so won the crown signified by his name. His love of God kept him from yielding to the ferocious mob; his love for his neighbor made him pray for those who were stoning him. Love inspired him to reprove those who erred, to make them amend; love led him to pray for those who stoned him, to save them from punishment. Strengthened by the power of his love, he overcame the raging cruelty of Saul and won his persecutor on earth as his companion in heaven. In his holy and tireless love he longed to gain by prayer those whom he could not convert by admonition.

“Love, indeed, is the source of all good things; it is an

impregnable defense, and the way that leads to heaven. He who walks in love can neither go astray nor be afraid; love guides him, protects him, and brings him to his journey's end."

In our prayers today we ask the Lord to "give us joy in honoring St. Stephen the martyr," (Prayer after Communion) and to "help us to imitate his goodness." (Opening Prayer).

ST. JOHN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

"God our Father, you have revealed the mysteries of your Word through John the apostle." (Opening Prayer).

St. John, son of Zebedee, brother of James, is one of the first of the apostles called by Jesus. John features prominently in the Gospel stories, was a privileged witness to many events, and a catalyst for responses from Jesus.

Is he the author of the fourth Gospel? Several early witnesses such as Irenaeus and Polycarp of Smyrna, and others say he is. Sifting through evidence and by critical study it is possible, even probable to conclude that he is. The form of the gospel we now have, however, represents editing and enlarging by a Palestinian Christian.

It is the most theological of the Gospels and it reveals the mysteries of the Word. "It is not the gospel of the kingdom, but the gospel of the person of Jesus himself. . . Jesus is clearly the preexistent Son and Word in whom the Father is revealed." (J.L. McKenzie). And as the Prayer after Communion in our Mass says: "John proclaimed that [the] Word became flesh for our salvation."

For John, the full reality of Jesus Christ is the risen, glorified Jesus, who is the Christ of faith. John attempted to present a reality which is not an object of historical experience. For John, to know Jesus only by historical experience is not to really know him, for that is to know him as he was remembered. John wants to present Jesus as he really is, for He is now risen and glorified. John's Jesus comes to us in the experience of grace. (Cf. John L. McKenzie, *Preface to The gospel according to St. John*, vol. 1, *New Testament for Spiritual reading*, v. 7).

It is impossible to do justice to the Gospel and to the spirituality of St. John in a few minutes. It is appropriate that we celebrate his feast during the Christmas season when we focus our attention on Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Light that shines in the darkness of our world and overcomes it with His love.

HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS

"At the king's command these innocent babies and little children were put to death; they died for Christ, and now in the glory of heaven as they follow him, the sinless Lamb, they sing forever: Glory to you, O Lord." (Antiphon at *Benedictus*).

This Antiphon from Morning Prayer for this feast tells us what it is all about. The Holy Innocents, who were infant martyrs, offered praise to God by the death they suffered for Christ. The Communion Antiphon says: "they have been ransomed for God and the Lamb as the first fruits of mankind."

St. Augustine in a homily that we formerly read on this day said:

"Behold, the sacrilegious [Herod] never could have so richly endowed this blessed legion of little ones though he showered them with his favors, as he did by bestowing upon them his hate. For the church shows by the solemnity of today's feast that as iniquity abounded against these little ones, so in the same degree grace and blessing rained down upon them" (Sermon 10 on the Saints).

The death of innocent children is a sorrowing tragedy; the senseless slaughter of children by a mad, jealous and insecure ruler is a monstrous act that defies explanation. The slaughter of innocents, however, goes on still today; millions are aborted every year. And it is a crime as heinous as that of the mad Herod, and possibly more inexcusable because of the senselessness of it.

The II Vatican Council in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* states: "Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes." (*Gaudium et spes*, 51).

St. Augustine calls the Holy Innocents "the Flowers of the Martyrs. . . They came forth in the midst of the winter of infidelity, the first buds of the Church, swelling forth to be nipped by the hoar frost of persecution." (*Op. cit.*).

A beautiful and relevant part of our daily prayer is found in the Intercessions at morning prayer and evening prayer. Unless you pray the *Liturgy of the Hours* each day, you miss these petitions. Let us pray these now:

God our Father,

"The Holy Innocents gave witness not by words but by their life's blood, — give us strength to be your witnesses before men, both by words and actions.

"They were not ready for battle but you made them fit to win the palm of victory, — now that we are prepared for victory, do not let us despair.

"You washed the robes of the Innocents in your blood; — cleanse us from all sin.

"You rewarded the child martyrs with the first share in your kingdom, — do not let us be cast out from the unending heavenly banquet.

"You knew persecution and exile as a child, — protect all children whose lives are in danger from famine, war and disaster, and protect the unborn from the crime of abortion.

"Father,

the Holy Innocents offered you praise by the death they suffered for Christ. May our lives bear witness to the faith we profess with our lips."

ST. THOMAS BECKET, BISHOP, MARTYR

Some of us are familiar with St. Thomas Becket (1118-1170) through the film "Becket," and the play "Murder in the Cathedral" by T.S. Eliot. Although dramatic these portraits are incomplete.

Thomas was Archdeacon of Canterbury. He was evidently a capable lawyer and a trusted emissary of Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury when at age 36 he met Henry of Anjou and supported his claim to the English throne. Henry respected his intelligence and made him Chancellor of the kingdom, and his life became one of luxury and magnificence. At the death of Theobald, Henry had Thomas nominated and elected Archbishop in 1162.

Thomas had given warning to Henry that he would not tolerate interference with the rights of the Church prior to his acceptance of the archbishopric. Once consecrated Thomas reformed his way of life. From luxury to austerity, from an obstinate rebellious spirit to a life of prayer and discipline.

Thomas expected difficulties with the king, and they soon followed. Henry understood that his friend, now archbishop, would continue to serve him on condition that "the honor due to God and to the Church of Rome were safeguarded." Thomas remained strong in upholding the rights of the Church, and ultimately gave "his life for the cause of justice. . .willing to renounce for Christ" the place he had attained in this world. (Cf. Opening Prayer).

St. Thomas Becket was martyred on December 29, 1170, at the altar in his cathedral, as a witness to the authority of the Church. St. Thomas Becket is a model for priests and pastors especially, who must resist temptations similar to those he resisted. They too experience daily conflict between political expediency on the one hand, and the duty which the leaders of God's people must witness and carry out on the other.

This struggle continues from St. Thomas' time to ours. There

will always be a need for champions of faith and christian steadfastness. St. Thomas Becket chose God and became a saint. There is a lesson and a hope for all of us in his example.

Thomas was declared a saint in 1173, three years after his death.

ST. SYLVESTER I, POPE

Sylvester is an important figure in the history of the papacy even though we know only the years of his reign, 314-335 A.D. These years coincide with the first period of peace for the Church following the edict of Constantine — the Edict of Milan — that ended the persecutions.

During his pontificate the Church grew openly as new dioceses or centers developed. The Bishop of Rome became more of a principle of unity and other bishops deferred to him. The first of the great ecumenical councils was held at this time, at Nicea, in 325, and the threat of the Arian heresy was dealt with. The Council defined as a matter of faith the divinity of Jesus Christ against Arius and his followers who taught that Jesus was a human being and only the adopted Son of God.

To have been Bishop of Rome and an acknowledged leader of the Church at his time must have been exciting and challenging. We may rightly presume that Sylvester capably met the challenge.

In the Office of Readings today we read how the Church responded to the freedom granted and joy experienced. Our chronicler is the early Church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea:

“Glory to God the almighty, the King of the universe, for all his gifts, and gratitude to Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of our souls, through whom we pray that this peace may be preserved for us stable and unshaken forever: a peace that will keep us safe from troubles outside as well as from all anxieties and disturbances of soul.

Eusebius expressed well the sentiments of all, and noted that there was “inexpressible joy and happiness. . .on every face.”

Today we pray that Pope St. Sylvester I will help and sustain us in our faith as he bolstered the spirits of the Church during the years of his pontificate.

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